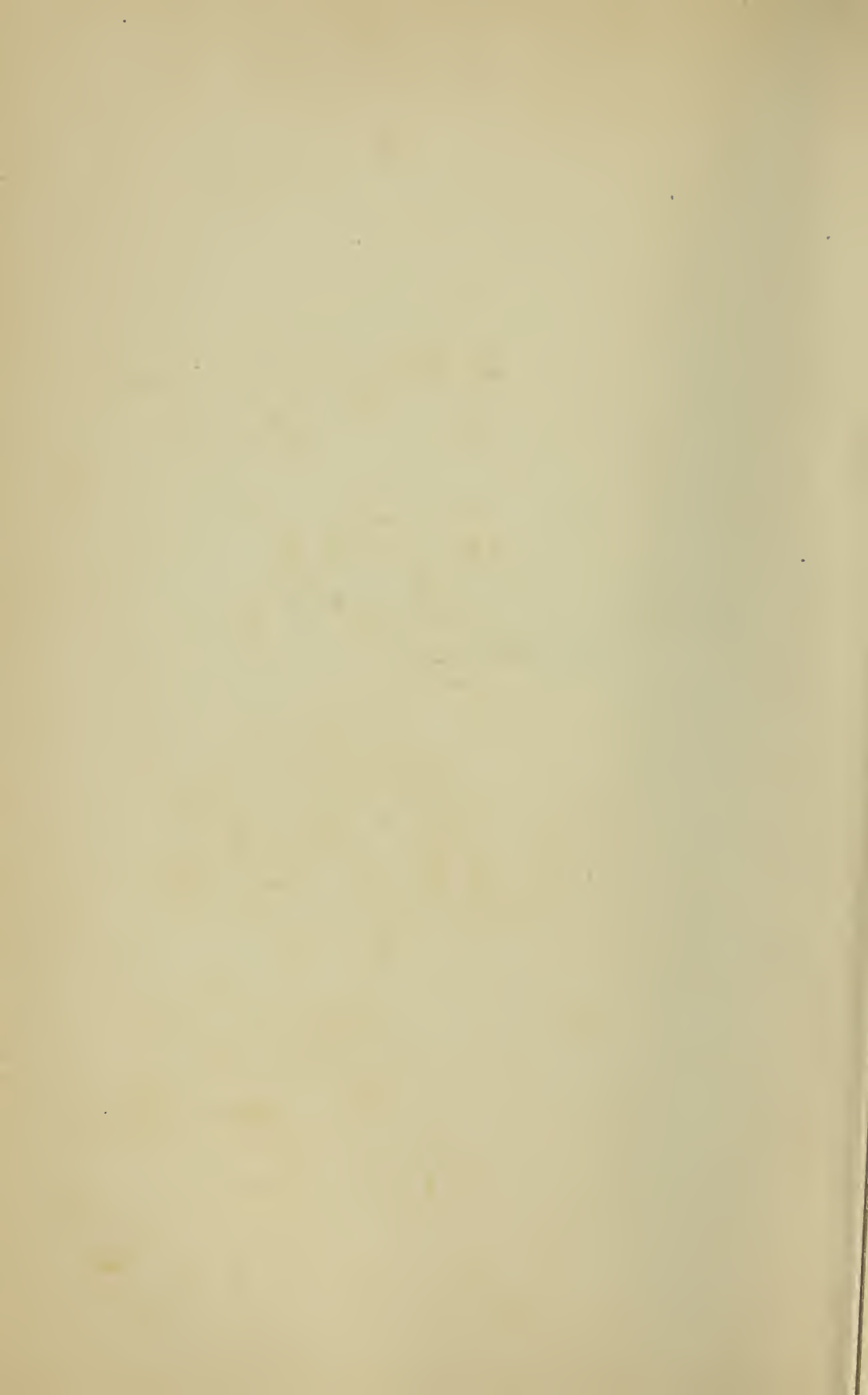




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EXPOSITORY ESSAYS AND
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EXPOSITORY ESSAYS

AND

DISCOURSES.

BY

SAMUEL COX,

EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITOR, AND AUTHOR OF "AN EXPOSITOR'S NOTE-BOOK,"
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PREFACE.

WITH natural surprise and pleasure I find that "An Expositor's Note-book" has reached a fourth edition, while "Biblical Expositions" is steadily passing out of a second edition. Encouraged by the generous welcome accorded to these former volumes, I now venture to issue what is virtually a third volume of the series. Like its predecessors, "Expository Essays and Discourses" is composed—for the most part, yet not wholly—of papers which have already appeared in various Magazines; like them, also, it deals for the most part with obscure and difficult Scriptures, or Scriptures of special moment and interest. I shall be very thankful if any of my brethren who have less leisure for study than myself, or less ample means and aids for the study of the Bible, should find my work in any way useful to them.

I have not included in this volume, though I may collect in a future volume, the contributions to "The Expositor" which have appeared over my own name; but as certain expository articles signed "Carpus" have met with a still more cordial reception from the critics and reviewers of that Magazine than those to which my own name has been appended, I have included most of these. It is time, perhaps, that I laid claim to these expositions, as more than

once my claim to them has been withstood to my face, and I have been assured, even by intimate friends, that it was impossible I should have written them. Such as they are, they *are* mine; and I now send them forth, in their new and revised form, in the hope that they may continue to prove useful and attractive to those who love the Word of God. Carpus of Troas, the friend and host of St. Paul, may or may not have read and pondered the manuscripts which the Apostle left in his charge; but I have always conceived of him as a man of literary tastes and aptitudes, as one of the obscure students and teachers of the Word in Apostolic times: and it is this conception of him which has led me now and then to borrow his name.

NOTTINGHAM,

September, 1877.

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EXPOSITORY ESSAYS,

ETC.



I.

The Sermon on the Mount.

ST. MATTHEW V.-VII.

THE Sermon on the Mount is confessedly the masterpiece of ethical wisdom. Nothing between the covers of the Bible is more admired, or so generally admired. Yet the Lord Jesus did not give the world his best wine in this cup, marvellous and precious though it be. The best thing in the Gospels is the gospel itself,—that manifestation of the righteousness and love of God in the person, the life, and the death of his Son by which He wins our love and makes us righteous. This disclosure of the redeeming love of God, which proves the Father of all men to be “the Saviour of all men,” is, beyond comparison, the most precious possession of the human race.

But after “the good tidings of great joy,” probably nothing is more precious to us than the Sermon in which the Lord Jesus places his ideal, the distinctively Christian ideal of human life before us,—an ideal so beautiful, and which so sweetly commends itself at once to our judgments and our hearts, that many who reject the Gospel nevertheless

confess this Sermon to be the most perfect and sublime discourse which ever fell from the lips of man.

It was in the second year of his public ministry that, on his return from a tour through the towns and villages of Galilee, the Lord Jesus ascended a mountain to which He loved to repair for meditation and communion with his Father in heaven. This mountain was, in all probability, a singular elevation, some seven miles from the Sea of Genesaret, which is known at this day as the *Kurn Hattin*, or "Horns of Hattin." It is an upland rather than a mountain, rising to about a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and distinctly marked out from the neighbouring eminences by the two humps or horns, which rise some sixty feet above and crown the summit. Between these "horns" there is a wide stretch of grass, a natural amphitheatre, in which a great multitude might easily gather within hearing of a single voice.

It was up the lower slopes of this mountain that the Lord Jesus went on the day He returned from his tour, followed by an immense multitude "from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan." Gliding from among them as the night fell, separating Himself, as it would seem, even from the Twelve, He retired into some solitary spot on the summit of the mountain, and continued all night in prayer unto God.

On *this* night the Son of Man might well feel his need of a Divine Communion; for, on the morrow, He was about to select the twelve men who were to be always with Him,—to set them apart, not from the world only, but even from the general circle of his disciples, and formally to lay down the laws of that kingdom of which they were to be the ambassadors and apostles. Accordingly, at early dawn, He called his disciples round Him, and chose from among

them "twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach." They had been called to his discipleship before ; now they are called to the apostleship,—called to leave all that they had, in order that they might follow Him and bear witness to Him.

While He was thus calling and consecrating the Twelve, great multitudes had assembled on the mountain, longing to hear his voice and to see some mighty work. "Seeing the multitudes," Jesus, followed by his disciples, came down from the horn, or peak, on which He stood, to the flat summit of the mountain,* on which the people were gathered, and went among them, healing the diseases by which many of them were afflicted, and casting out the unclean spirits by which they were possessed, the whole multitude pressing on Him, and seeking to touch Him, because a healing virtue went out of Him. Then, when they were seated on the flower-strewn grass of this natural amphitheatre, and were bending on Him attentive and expectant eyes, He seems to have climbed a few steps above them, and to have sat down, in the attitude of one who was about to teach. The apostles flock round Him and seat themselves nearest to Him, in the exercise of the right and privilege He had just conferred upon them. And then, "being set," He "lifted up his eyes," which had probably been bent downward in inward prayer, and "opened his mouth,"—a phrase used to denote the gravity of the occasion, and the solemnity and authority with which He spoke.

The Sermon dates itself—*i.e.*, it informs us at what season of the year it was preached. For as He spake, and to illustrate the lesson of tranquil rest in God, the Lord Jesus pointed the multitude to the lilies that clothed the grass with more than royal splendour, and to the birds—

* 'The level space' of which St. Luke speaks (vi. 17).

“the swifts”—that darted by, uttering their soft melodious wail; and the coming of the swifts and the opening of the lilies in the Galilean fields were signs that summer had begun. We may safely conclude, therefore, that the warm fragrant winds of early summer were blowing, and that the land was decked in its most varied and richest beauty when, seated on some jutting rock on the level summit of Hattin, the Son of Man preached this divine discourse.

The occasion which prompted it helps us in many ways to the right interpretation of the Sermon. It was this. After He had opened his ministry in Galilee, our Lord spent nearly a whole year in Jerusalem and its vicinity before He returned to the northern province and resumed his ministry among the peasants and boatmen with whom He had been familiar from childhood. We are told but little of his work in the metropolis during the time He sojourned in it, but we know that it issued in an open rupture with the rulers of the Jews—the priests and statesmen who, “dressed in a little brief authority,” did in very deed play “such fantastic tricks before high Heaven as made the angels weep.” So soon as they had caught the real scope and purport of his mission, they “persecuted Jesus, and sought to slay Him.”

Rejected in Judæa, He returned to Galilee. And here, at first, He won great favour with the common people. They heard Him gladly. They followed Him from place to place, that they might hear more of the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. His popularity and success were reported to the rulers in Jerusalem, who sent “doctors” into Galilee to collect materials for a charge against Him, and to “concert with the local Pharisees” how they might damage his reputation and lessen his influence with the friendly multitudes that followed Him. Finding Himself thus dogged and opposed, He set Himself

to consolidate and organize his kingdom, to bind to his service those who were willing to risk all for his sake, and to give them leaders and guides. It was with this view that He chose the Twelve, who were to be always with Him,—always learning that they might teach, and developed in them spiritual gifts and powers which fitted them to co-operate with Him, and to carry on his work when He should be taken away. It was with this view also that He publicly and solemnly proclaimed to the multitude the laws of his kingdom, shewed them what manner of men they must become if they would be his disciples indeed, how pure and heavenly must be their spirit if they would enter the kingdom of heaven.

Some formal and authoritative proclamation of the principles on which his kingdom was to be based was greatly needed. For even the friendly multitude had formed many erroneous conceptions of Him, and of the spiritual kingdom He came to set up. In common with their whole race—and, one may almost say, in common with the whole world,—they were expecting the advent of a great Teacher and Deliverer, who should give men “nobler modes of life, with sweeter manners, purer laws,” who should set up a veritable “kingdom of heaven” on the earth. They eagerly embraced the good news which Jesus proclaimed, that this kingdom of heaven was now at hand. They were even disposed to believe that He Himself was the promised Deliverer and Teacher. Some of them were fully persuaded that in Him they had found the Messiah, and had cheerfully left house and home that they might follow Him whithersoever He went, “being, every one of them, however, big with Expectation from Him, that they should make their Fortunes in his service.” What most of all they needed was to be undeceived and instructed, to be stripped of the gross and erroneous conceptions and hopes they had formed, and to

be taught what they might really expect and hope for if they committed themselves to Him. And this most necessary instruction they received in the Sermon on the Mount, which they found to be a very Sermon *on the Mount*, since they discovered that they must climb high above their former selves if they were to dwell in its pure and lofty atmosphere and to breathe its spirit. The very Beatitudes, with which the Sermon opens, sufficed to shew them how wrongly they had conceived of the Messianic kingdom, how utterly their thoughts and expectations must be changed and raised if they were to accept *Jesus* as the Christ, and his kingdom as the kingdom of God. They had been taught by their rabbis to believe that when the Christ came they would be enriched with inexhaustible wealth, the gold and silver of all nations flowing into Jerusalem; that they would riot in mirth and luxury; that they would be permitted to take an ample revenge on all their enemies and to trample them under their feet. They believed that, instead of any longer earning a livelihood by the painful labours of a lawful vocation, they would be called to conquer and despoil the world; that, instead of shewing gentleness and compassion, they would be allowed to indulge the cruel and violent passions which wait on the sword; that, instead of paying tribute to Cæsar, the Messiah would summon them to revolt and conquest, and to set the world aflame, to pursue to the uttermost all that stood in their way, "without any thought of forgiving the injuries or patiently bearing the losses they had sustained from their enemies." In short, nothing could be more opposed to the spirit and laws of Jesus the Saviour than the Messianic conceptions and hopes which they had been led to frame. It was to correct these misconceptions that the Beatitudes were uttered. Over against their expectation of unbounded wealth, and in rebuke of their covetous and ambitious spirit, Christ set

his blessing on poverty and poverty of spirit. Over against their hope of an unstinted sensual mirth and enjoyment, He set his blessing on those who mourn. Over against their thirst for a fierce exterminating revenge on their enemies, He set his blessing on the meek. Over against their lust of conquest and spoliation and plunder, He set his blessing on righteousness and equity. Over against the spirit of hard unrelenting cruelty with which, as they conceived, their conquests were to be pursued, He set his blessing on the merciful and compassionate. Over against their hope of an unbridled indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, He set his blessing on purity of heart. Over against their eager anticipation of successful insurrection and revolt, He set his blessing on the lovers and makers of peace. Over against their design to pursue their enemies to the uttermost, He set his blessing on those who, so far from inflicting, patiently endure loss and wrong and persecution. Obviously, it entered into our Lord's design in uttering the whole series of Beatitudes, although it by no means exhausted his design, to correct the misconceptions of the Jewish multitude He addressed, to warn them against the evil dispositions they cherished and hoped to indulge in the very name of Religion, and to shew them what manner of men they must become if they would acknowledge Him for their Lord and be enrolled among the subjects of his kingdom. In fine, so soon as we apprehend the occasion which prompted the Discourse, we get a new insight into its meaning throughout, just as, when we know at what season and amid what scenes it was delivered, we find new beauty in many of its illustrations.

So much, then, for the scene, the time, and the occasion of the Sermon. It was preached in the green and sheltered amphitheatre on the summit of Hattin, what time the grass was bright with flowers and the air musical with the notes

of birds ; and it was designed to shew the multitude what were the principles and laws of the kingdom they were minded to enter.

I. THE ARGUMENT OF THE SERMON.

The main theme and *the argument* of the Sermon are not so easily determined as the conditions under which it was delivered ; and even so great an expositor as Calvin has affirmed that it is not a sermon at all, but a collection of ethical maxims uttered by our Lord at different times in the course of his ministry, and arranged in one discourse by the evangelist Matthew. That theory, however, finds little support from the scholars of the present age ; and, indeed, it never deserved so much as it once met. *They* are pretty well agreed that the Sermon on the Mount is a veritable sermon ; though some of them maintain that St. Matthew has only presented the outlines of it. And, I suppose, the popular conception of the Sermon is that, whether St. Matthew collected into one discourse the moral sayings uttered at various times, or whether he cared only to preserve the outlines of a discourse actually uttered on the horns of Hattin, what he really gives us is a series of weighty but disjointed utterances, without order or method, or logical connection. To most readers of the New Testament, I apprehend, the noble sayings which compose this Sermon have even less connection than the beads of a necklace, however valuable each may be in itself ; for the beads are at least strung on a single cord, and do not merely touch each other on the outside.

Those who have entertained this conception of the Sermon on the Mount cannot get rid of it too soon or too completely. We shall never understand or appreciate the Sermon as we may and ought until we perceive that it has an organic and vital unity, until we see what the order and

method of it are, and can link on thought to thought and verse to verse. Nor is it so difficult as it may seem to trace out the theme which gives unity and force to the whole discourse ; for, when once the clue is put into our hands, we can only wonder that we should ever have missed our way.

It will help us to seize and to retain the clue, if we bear well in mind that in this Sermon our Lord gave his first formal and public deliverance of the great body of truths He came to teach, of the moral laws and principles which He regarded it as his special mission to establish, and if we ask ourselves what we should expect to hear from Him on an occasion so solemn, and pregnant, and momentous.

What *was* his mission, then? His mission was to establish "the kingdom of heaven" upon the earth. Should we not expect, then, to hear from Him a formal and complete statement of the laws and principles by which that kingdom was ruled, and by a willing obedience to which men might enter it? But there was already a divine kingdom on the earth, or what claimed to be a divine kingdom, in the Hebrew Commonwealth and in the Law that came by Moses. Should we not, then, expect to hear how the new form of this kingdom was related to the old, and in what the new was better than the old which it came to supersede? Well, this is precisely what Christ gives us in the Sermon on the Mount. He meets our natural expectations: He does lay down the laws and principles of the kingdom of heaven; He does shew how the new form of that kingdom which He came to set up was related to the old Jewish form, and in what respects it excelled and surpassed it. And here we have the only clue we require to the true method and connection of this sublime Discourse.

But we may put the case in another and a still more helpful form, because a form which recalls many of the

most memorable and impressive sayings of the Sermon. The Mosaic law was given to reveal the righteousness of God, and to induce men to make that righteousness their own. The Hebrews were called to a special communion and a special relation to Him, that they might become both a righteous people and a model and pattern of righteousness to all the earth. In like manner, as St. Paul affirms, Christ came to reveal the righteousness of God, in order that we might submit to it instead of any longer going about to establish a righteousness of our own.* That is to say, He came to disclose the right and kind will of God, and in disclosing this Will to put before men an ideal of life at once higher than any they had known before, and, in much, contradictory to the ideals they had hitherto cherished. He came to teach that to live in love was better than to strive for supremacy, that to be poor in spirit was better than to be rich in goods, that to be wise was better than to be powerful, that to be good was better than to be wise, that to bear pain was better than to inflict it, that to serve others was at once better than to rule them and the only true way of ruling them, that to overcome evil with good was better than to return blow for blow and curse for curse; and this was an ideal which, while it transcended, also contradicted the ideal of life that ruled the heathen world. He came, moreover, to teach that obedience is better than sacrifice, that an inward faith is better than an outward service, that a secret and modest goodness is better than a scrupulous and ostentatious observance of religious rule; in brief, that charity is the end of the commandment and the fulfilling of the law: and this was an ideal which at once transcended and contradicted the Hebrew ideal of life.

Now, as Christ came to reveal the righteousness of God, should we not expect to hear from Him in what that right-

* Romans x. 3, 4.

eousness consisted? As He came to reverse and surpass the conceptions of righteousness which men then held to be the highest and best, should we not expect to hear from Him how his righteousness stood related to these former conceptions and ideals, and in what respects it excelled them? Well, but this again is the true clue to the meaning and connection of his Discourse. He meets our expectations. He shews us both what the new righteousness is, and in what, if we take Him for our Teacher and Lord, our righteousness must exceed not only that of the heathen and the publican, but also that of the Pharisees and Scribes.

Let us take this clue in our hands, then, and follow it throughout the Sermon. Unless I much mistake, it will guide us safely from end to end.

The Sermon opens with "the Beatitudes." And here, in eight matchless sentences, Christ claims as his own the poor in spirit, those who mourn for sin, the meek, those who yearn for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the pacific, and those who suffer for righteousness' sake. *These* are the qualities and virtues He singles out for the special approbation of Heaven. The new righteousness, that which men are to seek, and seek first, is not wealth, nor high estate, nor courage, nor political power, nor culture, nor wisdom, nor an exact observance of maxims and rites, but humility, penitence, meekness, compassion, purity, peacefulness, patience—virtues, in short, which men had heretofore hardly regarded as virtues, and still less as the highest virtues. He then shews his disciples how great their blessedness will be, how healthy their influence, how fruitful their service, if they possess themselves of the new righteousness; they will be as the salt of a corrupted world, the light of a darkened world, and will win men, by their good deeds, to glorify their Father in heaven.

But all this was so new and surprising, so much in

advance of the current conceptions of what was right and good and fair, that, lest men should suppose He asked them to break with the past and with all that was good in it and best, the Lord Jesus proceeds to shew both that his righteousness is a development, a fulfilment, of the highest law yet given to man, that He has come not to destroy but to complete and perfect it ; and that the new righteousness is better than the old, because it fulfils and completes it, because it is so much more searching and inward and spiritual. He has not come to take away a single jot or tittle from the law, to break, or to teach men to break, even the least of its commandments ; and yet, if they would enter the kingdom of heaven, their righteousness must exceed that of the most punctilious observers of the old law. To make this clear, He contrasts the new righteousness with the old, the Gospel with the Law, in five cardinal points of the moral code : in the law of murder, the law of adultery, the law of oaths, the law of retaliation, and the law of charity. As He knew that out of the heart are the issues of life, He carried the Divine law *inward*, and gave it authority over the thoughts and passions of the soul. He sought to purify and sweeten human conduct by sweetening and purifying its source. The law had been content, in the ruder stages of society, to forbid the murder which springs from anger ; but He forbids the anger from which it springs, affirming that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, although his hatred should not express itself in any overt act. The law had forbidden the act of lust ; He condemns the adultery of the eye and of the heart. The law, restraining the natural inconstancy of passion, had forbidden men to put away their wives save by a public and legal act ; He makes it criminal to divorce a wife save for the one crime which proves her to have already separated herself from her husband. The law had forbidden the violation of oaths ;

He teaches men to cultivate the sincerity which renders oaths unnecessary, affirming not that they are evil in themselves indeed, but that they come of that which is evil, of the insincerity and untrustworthiness into which men have fallen. The law, because of the weakness of those who had received it, had permitted retaliation; He bids us, instead of requiting evil with evil, to overcome evil with good. The law had enjoined men to love their friends only; He enjoins us to love our very enemies, that so we may become perfect, even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect. In each case He shows that his new righteousness is simply an extension, a development, of the old; and that, simply because it is a development, a fulfilment, it must be better than the old.

So that, in the first section of his Sermon (Chap. v.), He takes the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven for his theme, and shews us both what it is in itself, and how it transcends the righteousness which is of the law: in Verses 1-16 He teaches us what it is in itself, what virtues it inculcates and demands; and, in the rest of the Chapter, He proves that, in five main respects, it transcends the older righteousness.

In the next section of the Sermon (Chap. vi.) He pursues precisely the same theme in the very same method; though now his Discourse takes even a more practical and familiar tone. In Verses 1-18, He shews that in the daily duties, in the ritual, of religion, no less than in its moral code, the new righteousness is better than the old: that it is better in almsgiving, better in prayer, better in fasting; and better very mainly because it is unostentatious, simple, modest; because it "does its righteousness" unto God, and not to be seen of men: while, in Verses 16-34, He shews what this new righteousness is in itself,—bidding men take in the whole round of their daily life the same simple, unostenta-

tious, unselfish, and unworldly tone which He had enjoined them to take when they worshipped God, and thus to make their whole life worshipful. They are to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth; they are to keep a single eye that they may walk in light; they are not to attempt an impossible combination of the service of Mammon with the service of God; they are to replace an anxious care for the morrow with a cordial trust in Him who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the fowl of the air. In the worship of the Sanctuary and in the daily worship of an obedient and heavenly life, they are to transcend the current conceptions of righteousness; their lives are to be as much better than those of the Pharisees as their thoughts are to be higher than the teaching of the Scribes.

In the final section of the Sermon (Chap. vii.) the same strain of thought is continued and carried to a noble close. Our Lord still has the new and the old righteousness in his mind, and runs a tacit comparison between them. The Scribes and Pharisees were nothing if not critical and censorious; but we, if we would have and shew the true righteousness, are not to judge our neighbours, not to pluck at motes in their eyes while some monstrous beam is projecting from our own. *They* were ostentatious, doing their good deeds to be seen of men; but *we* are not to parade our religious principles and emotions, lest we profane that which is holy and vulgarize that which is select and precious—casting that which should be sacred to God before the dogs and pearls before swine (Verses 1-6). But, as it is very hard to subdue the censoriousness and vanity which are native to us, our Lord bids us pray for Divine help in our great task, and assures us that, if we ask, we shall have, that if we seek, we shall find (Verses 7-11).

In the Golden Rule (Verse 12), He sums up our whole duty to man, bidding us do to others "all things whatso-

ever" we would that they should do to us; and assuring us that, if we thus replace our natural selfishness with charity, we shall rise into a righteousness which will be the fulfilment of whatever either the law or the prophets have enjoined. A golden rule indeed; no doubt obedience to it would bring in the golden age: but it is as hard to obey as it is easy to repeat. To obey it is like pushing through a strait gate and walking in a narrow path; whereas to follow the promptings of our native selfishness is like passing through a wide gate and walking in a broad way, with many companions at our side. Christ exhorts us to prefer the strait gate and narrow path of charity, since this leads to the lofty halls and ample spaces of eternal life; while the way of selfishness, though the entrance to it be spacious and the path easy for a time, can only land us in the dark and crowded pit of perdition (Verses 13, 14).

He is urgent with us that we make a right choice, for a special danger attends the act of choice. False prophets hang about the gates to beguile us into a wrong choice, to betray us to our harm; to put a noble seeming of manliness and independence on self-will and self-indulgence, and a mean appearance of weakness and cowardice on the righteousness which springs from love. Against these misguided and misleading prophets, who hide a wolf's heart under their fleece, we must be on our guard (Verses 15-23).

And so we reach the close of the Sermon in the impressive parable on Profession and Obedience, in which the issues of the old and the new righteousness are set forth. The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was a righteousness of the word and the mouth, of publicity and parade; the righteousness of Christ is to be a righteousness in deed and in reality. Their righteousness was built on the sand of profession; his, on the rock of obedience. Sand may be a good foundation where there are

no tides, no torrents, no storms; and talk might serve our turn did we not live in a world of realities: but the world is very real, with real and perilous storms of change in it. To build on sand is, therefore, to lose our labour; we can be secure against all tides and storms only as we build on the solid rock.

A more detailed and elaborate examination of the movement of thought in this incomparable Discourse would have greatly strengthened our argument; but even this brief and meagre outline of it may suffice to shew that the Sermon on the Mount is a true sermon, quick with a vital and organic unity, and not a mere collection of detached and unconnected maxims. Its sole and ruling theme is *Righteousness*—the righteousness which Christ came to reveal, and the superiority of this new Christian righteousness over that of the law which He came both to fulfil and to abolish by fulfilling it. And when once we grasp this theme, we may easily trace it through its modulations, and see how it moulds and inspires the whole Discourse.

II. THE STYLE OF THE SERMON.

With the great masters, whether they display their genius in painting, in music, in song, or in less impassioned and rhythmical modes of speech, form and substance are, if not wholly one, yet so closely connected that to touch the one is to impair the other. The style in which they express their thought is so far part of their thought that if you translate their conception into other words or forms, it instantly and obviously becomes less perfect than it was. Not only does it lose a portion of its force and beauty, but often it loses the very quality in which its real force and beauty lay. It is the same, yet, oh, how different! It is the same thought, only in the sense in which Samson was the same

man after he had been shorn of the locks that were at once his strength and his crown.

This vital and subtle inter-relation of style and substance, form and matter, which is characteristic of all noble utterance and expression, we find, as we should expect to find it, in the Sermon on the Mount; insomuch that if we fix our attention on any one distinctive quality of its style, we become aware that the secret of its power lies, not simply in any peculiarity of outward form, but in the vital substance which stirs beneath it and within it; not in the body which it has assumed, though this too is part and parcel of its very being, but in the spirit which quickens it, and breathes through it, and gives out the influence by which we are moved. Great thoughts were never expressed in simpler words; yet, somehow, the words not only live, but give life: they have raised and cleansed the whole tone of human society: to use Job's figure, they have taken hold of the corners of the earth, and have shaken much of the ancient wickedness out of it.

The most pronounced characteristics of the style of this Sermon are, perhaps, these three: it is *authoritative*; it is *paradoxical*; it is *original*. What most struck those who heard it was that Jesus spake "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." What most strikes us, as we study it, is its paradoxes—the proverbs in it which (apparently) enjoin impossible duties, duties which Christ Himself did not discharge, which no sane man would think of discharging, lest the world should be given over to the tyranny of the base and the wicked. And what has most struck the world at large is the originality of the discourse, its utter unlikeness to anything uttered before or since; its immense, almost infinite, superiority to aught that has fallen even from the wisest lips.* But each of these distinctive qualities is a

* "Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism,

quality not of the style only, but also of the substance of the discourse; as we speak of them, we shall be compelled to pass through the form of the Sermon to the thoughts that burn in it and breathe.

(1) *The Style is Authoritative.*—"It came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings that the people were astonished at his teaching; for He taught *as one having authority*, and not as the Scribes." But it was not merely the manner of his teaching—though that, no doubt, was very grave and sweet—which conveyed this impression of authority to the listening multitude, but the truths He taught: it was more what He said than how He said it, as we may infer from the contrast which the people saw between his teaching and that of the Scribes. True, He spoke in his own name, while they spoke in the names of other and greater men than themselves: they were commentators; He gave a text for commentators. True, too, that they were cold and austere in manner, while He was genial and sympathetic. So that there *was* a marked difference between his style and theirs. But the great difference was in the teaching itself, in its substance. The Scribes were for ever pottering over their musty parchments, repeating and elucidating dead men's thoughts, citing ancient precedents, seeking to stereotype old forms of thought and conduct, and to crush down whatever was fresh and vigorous with the power of a new and generous life. Above all, they

Christ is still left,—*a unique figure, not more unlike all his precursors than all his followers*, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. . . . About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a *stamp of personal originality*, combined with profundity of insight which if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the thoughts of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast."—*John Stuart Mill, "Essays on Religion,"* p. 264.

were for ever seeking to enforce an outward law, a law which they read in the letter and not in the spirit, a law which they interpreted, by their own prejudices, for their own aggrandizement. One can well understand therefore that the multitude, oppressed and bound their whole life long by legal enactment and traditional comment, feeling as though the very air were choked with the dust of the past, would listen with delighted astonishment to the words of a Teacher who disdained the technicalities of the Schools, in whose mind even the most familiar truths took forms that were natural and fresh and vital, who spoke of God as a loving Father rather than as an austere and exacting Taskmaster, declared the kingdom of heaven to be among them and within them, and affirmed the truth to be even more fully present with them than it had been with their fathers. Instead of quoting ancient parchments and appealing to musty precedents, the Lord Jesus pointed them to the flowers that grew in the grass and the birds which flew above their heads, to the bounties of Providence new every morning and the good thoughts and kindly affections which stirred within their own breasts. Instead of seeking to impose an outward law on reluctant necks, He bade them follow the impulses of an inward life. In place of fettering them with rules and maxims, He taught them great simple principles of action and left them to apply them for themselves. For letter, He gave them spirit; for form, life; instead of bidding them defer to authority, He bade them of themselves judge that which is right,—appealing from the outward to the inward, from the past to the present, from rules to principles, from synagogues and courts to the living consciousness of men. If his style was new in its simplicity, its geniality, its freedom from scholastic terms and technicalities, much more was the substance of his teaching new,—new in its freedom, in its power, in its recognition of a present and living Fountain of truth, in its appeal to the moral instincts

and intuitions, in its preference of the inward over the outward, of the heart over the appearance, of a willing obedience to a reluctant conformity to commands.

(2) But if those who heard this Sermon were most sensible of the tone of living power and authority with which Christ spoke, of his vivid stimulating appeal to the authorities of the conscience and the heart, what most strikes, and most perplexes, us as we study it, is the paradoxes with which it abounds, the proverbial injunctions which appear to contradict not only our own deepest convictions of what is true and right, but also the very example of Christ Himself and of those who had most of his spirit. Nothing in the Sermon, nothing perhaps in the whole New Testament, has more puzzled and "offended" men than such injunctions as these: "Swear not at all: Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also: If any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall impress thee to go a mile, go with him twain: Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." As we consider these words, and such as these, we are tempted—and surely it is no impious motive which tempts us—to say: "These are immoral maxims. Christ Himself did not observe them; *we* cannot observe them without subverting the social order and yielding the world to the tyranny of the violent, the rapacious, the unjust. He who here says, 'Swear not all,' often took an oath upon his lips. When He was smitten on the one cheek,* He did not turn the other to the smiter, but firmly though gently rebuked him. And how could we submit to every exaction which the fraudulent or the strong would impose upon us, and give to all who ask of us, and lend to all who would borrow, without at once bringing misery and ruin

* John xviii. 23.

on ourselves and pandering to the evil lusts of our neighbours?"

The objection is a grave one, and needs to be thoroughly answered; for not only is it urged by those who doubt and by those who reject the Christian Faith: it is also felt, and felt painfully, by many who accept that faith and cling to it. Many a good man has risen from the study of these maxims with a weary brain and a troubled heart, quite sure perhaps that there was a divine meaning in them, but equally sure that it was utterly beyond his reach.

Now it is not a sufficient reply to this grave objection, although it is a reply with which many are content, to say: "Were *all* men to act on these maxims, as one day all men will, there would be no difficulty, since none would then be covetous or unjust." That is true, doubtless: and, doubtless, our Lord contemplated a time when the whole world would be ruled by the law of love. *But we are not to wait till then before we act on that law.* We are to act on it at once, while there is much that is evil both in our own hearts and in the world around us; and how, while evil is still so strong, can we prudently act on such maxims as these? nay, how can we act on them without injuring the neighbours we are bound to serve, by giving scope to their worst and basest passions?

The true answer to the objection I take to be this:—That our Lord is not here giving us maxims to which we are to render a literal obedience, but is rather giving us principles which we are to apply with discretion; *and that He states these principles paradoxically precisely in order that we may not degrade them into mere maxims and rules.*

The conditions of human life are so complex and subtle that it is simply impossible to lay down maxims, or rules of conduct, binding on all men under all circumstances, the invariable obedience of which will not be attended with the

grossest injustice. Laws, for example, legal maxims and rules which are only intended to guard legal rights, are often inequitable in their operation, however impartially they may be administered (*summa jus summa injuria*); and therefore it is that we are more and more giving a large discretion to our judges in order that they may attemper the administration of the law with equity—in order, *i. e.*, that they may not apply an inelastic and inexorable rule to every man's case, but may so vary the application of it as to make due allowance for differences of condition and motive. "One law for rich and poor" used to be a cherished maxim, a popular demand: it is still, strange to say, a popular demand with the very class to which the concession of it would be most injurious. For what can be more radically unjust than that there should be one and the same law for poor and rich? The expense of setting the law in operation might be nothing to the rich man, while to the poor man it might be so formidable as that, rather than incur it, he would put up with a serious loss or wrong. The fine, which a rich man would hardly feel, might be ruinous to a poor man; and, on the other hand, the penalty which a poor man might suffer without much hardship or damage, might involve loss of status, or health, or good name to a man more delicately reared and of a higher social grade.

But if legal maxims and rules are thus unequal in their pressure, how much more unequal would moral rules be, rules that should affect to define the exact moral right—what every man should do in this case or that? We vary so in character, in position, in culture, in means, and the conditions under which we act are so complex and differ and combine so strangely, that it is impossible to lay down any invariable rule on how a wrong should be met, for instance, or on how much we should give to those who ask of us, or how much and how often we should lend to

those who would borrow of us. What we want, what alone will truly help us, is not an inflexible rule, but a large general principle capable of being variously applied, applied reasonably and with discretion, to the different circumstances and exigencies in which we are placed. *Principles* may be just all round, if they are wisely acted on; but definite inelastic rules *must* be unjust, however fairly applied, simply because they leave no scope for judgment, because they will not stretch and vary till they answer to every man's need. That we should cherish a meek and forgiving spirit, and that we should cherish a generous and helpful spirit, are principles, and are therefore capable of the widest and most varied application; and both these principles Christ lays down: but any conceivable rule about what offences should be forgiven and what not forgiven, or in what forms we ought to help our neighbours and in what we ought not to help them, must inevitably work unjustly, simply because it was a rule, because, *i.e.*, it was precise, rigid, invariable. Hence it is that Christ gives us principles, not rules; and hence too it was that the great Apostle was impatient of rules until he could get down to the principles on which they were based.

And yet, partial and unjust as rules are, and must be, in their operation, all history proves that the vast majority of men prefer them to principles. Principles tax thought; they involve responsibility; and, for the most part, men hate the labour of thought and shrink from the burden of responsibility. They would rather have a definite maxim, which points out with precision what they are or are not to do, than be compelled to pause and reflect how a principle impinges on the course of action they propose to take. So marked and strong is this preference that, throughout the whole history of the Church, we see them degrading the broad principles taught by Christ into petty and binding

maxims,—laying down rules of worship, for example, which reduce it to a mere ritualism, or laying down rules about what may or may not be done on Sundays, instead of gratefully accepting the principle, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;” or defining by law their duties to their neighbours instead of acting on what should be called “the golden *principle*” rather than “the golden *rule*,”—“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

How, then, was the Great Teacher so to cast his principles as that they should at once seize on the popular imagination, and at the same time refuse to be ground down into mere maxims and rules? He could only secure these ends, I apprehend, by adopting the method which all the great masters of human wisdom have freely used; viz., by casting his principles in proverbial and paradoxical forms. Whatever else it may become, *a rule that will not work can never become an accepted rule of human conduct*. When Jesus said, “Swear not at all,” although He Himself did not scruple to use an oath; when He bade men, smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also, although He did not do it Himself, He could not fail to awaken attention and surprise. When He threw principles into the form of rules obedience to which was and is impossible, it is at least certain that they would never be adopted *as rules*. Such paradoxes as these were sure to excite thought and prolonged reflection. Men would be, as indeed we see that they are, compelled to consider them, to ask what they mean, *i.e.*, what is the principle that underlies them. And when once they were set thinking, there was no great difficulty in reaching his meaning, if at least they were reasonable, and really wished to find a principle on which they could act. When He who, for the confirmation of our faith, often took an oath, said, “Swear not at all,” we may easily see that

what He meant was, "Do not you Jews employ the evasive and deceptive oaths common on your lips and allowed by the Scribes: do not swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by your heads, supposing that, because you do not mention the name of God, your oath is not binding; it is binding; for you do virtually swear by God, since heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool, since Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and only He can so much as make a single hair of your head black or white." And, of course, *the principle* of his command—that which is for all men, in all times—is not that they should always, and under all circumstances, refuse to take an oath; but that they should, at all times and under all circumstances, refuse to take evasive and deceitful oaths, that they should be true to their oaths, true even to their word, that they should be content with plain "russet yeas, and honest kersey noes." So again, when He who, on being struck by an apparitor, gently yet firmly rebuked him, bids us, if smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also, we may easily see what it is that He really means. We cannot take his words as conveying a rule on the letter of which we are to act, since, were we invariably to act on it, we should not be shewing a wise love for our neighbour, but should rather pander to his anger and violence. And, therefore, we are compelled to look for a principle in the words till we see their meaning to be, that we are not to meet rage and violence with violence and rage, but with meekness, friendliness, forgiveness.*

* Godet's solution of the problem is very fine, and leads to the same conclusion, though by another road. He says (Commentary on Luke chap. vi., vers. 29, 30,) "Jesus means that *as far as itself* is concerned, charity knows no limit to its self-denial. If, therefore, it ever sets a term to its concessions, it is in no way because it feels its patience exhausted; true charity is infinite as God Himself, whose essence it is. Its limit, if it has any, is not that which its rights draw around it; it is a limit like that which the beautiful defines for itself, proceeding from

Anecdotes, as a rule, seem woefully out of place in an exposition ; but at this point of my argument two recur to my memory, which will make it clearer than many pages of laborious commentary : and therefore, though still with some reluctance, I will tell them. It is said that many years ago an eminent minister of the Gospel, who had been a great athlete in his youth, on returning to his native town soon after he had been ordained, encountered in the High Street an old companion whom he had often fought and thrashed in his godless days. "So, you've turned Christian, they tell me, Charley?" said the man. "Yes," replied the minister. "Well, then, you know the Book says, If you're struck on one cheek, you're to turn the other. Take *that* ;" and with that hit him a stinging blow. "There, then," replied the minister quietly, turning the other side of his face toward him. The man was brute enough to strike him heavily again. Whereupon the minister said, "And *there* my commission ends," pulled off his coat, and gave his antagonist a severe thrashing, which no doubt he richly deserved. But did the minister keep the command of Christ? He obeyed the letter of the rule ; but did he not violate the principle, the spirit, of it?

Hear the other story, and judge. It is told of a celebrated officer in the army that, as he stood leaning over a wall in the barrack-yard, one of his military servants, mistaking him for a comrade, came softly up behind him, and suddenly struck him a hard blow. When the officer looked round, his servant, covered with confusion, stammered out, "I beg your pardon, sir ; I thought it was George." His master gently replied : "And if it were George, why strike so hard?"

within. It is in charity that the disciple of Jesus yields, when he yields ; it is in charity also that he resists, when he resists. *Charity has no other limit than itself ; that is to say, it is boundless.*"

Which now of these two really obeyed the command of Christ? the minister who made a rule of it and kept to the letter of the rule, or the officer who made a principle of it, and, acting on the spirit of it, neglected the letter? Obviously, the minister disobeyed the command in obeying it, while the officer obeyed the command in disobeying it.

And here we may see the immense superiority of a principle over a rule. Take a rule, *any* rule, and there is only one way of keeping it, the way of literal obedience, and this may often prove a foolish and even a disobedient way. But get a principle, and there are a thousand ways in which you may apply it, all of which may be wise, beneficial to you and no less beneficial to your neighbour.

So, once more, with that other command of Christ's to which we have referred, the command about giving and lending. If we make a rule of it, if we give to every beggar in the streets who asks of us, and lend to every lazy rogue who would rather "sorn" on his neighbours than do a stroke of honest work, we shall soon have nothing left either to give or lend; all that will be left us will be the conviction that we have ruined ourselves to injure our neighbours. But if we get at the principle of the command, if we shew a considerate, kindly, generous spirit, if we are ready to deny ourselves that we may help the poor and needy with discretion, though, in this case, the probability is that we shall never acquire great wealth, there is no reason why we should not always have enough for ourselves and a little to spare for our neighbours; there is every reason why we should feel that we are obeying the law of Christ and contributing to the welfare of the world.

Christ gives us in this Sermon, then, principles, not rules; and *He casts these principles in paradoxical forms in order that we may not be able to degrade them into rules.* He wishes to compel us to reflect, not to save us the trouble of

reflection; not to spare us the responsibility of choice, but to win us to a right choice. And therefore He speaks to us in proverbs, in paradoxes, to which we cannot give a literal and exact obedience. We are obliged to search into them for principles by the impossibility of accepting them as rules: and, as we search, we discover that we then do his will, not when we refuse to take a legal oath, but when we cultivate a truthful spirit; not when we turn the other cheek to the smiter, but when we conquer anger and violence with meekness and love; not when we give or lend to every one that asks of us, but when we cherish a generous and benevolent spirit.

III. THE ORIGINALITY OF THE SERMON.

We have already seen that the Sermon on the Mount has a theme which is logically developed, thought rising out of thought, one saying suggesting another; that it does not consist of a collection of detached and unconnected maxims, but that it runs through the successive stages of a single argument, is pervaded and dominated by a remarkable unity of thought, and mounts to a noble and impressive close.

We have also seen that in style it is both authoritative and paradoxical; and that Jesus cast the truths He came to teach into the form of paradoxes in order that men might be for ever unable to degrade them into mere rules, in order that they might be compelled to search for the broad general principles which underlie them.

We have now only to consider the *originality* of this divine Discourse; and on this point, if we may for a moment adopt the paradoxical manner of the Sermon itself, our main endeavour will be to shew that it is at once original and not original, that it is all the more original because it makes no pretension to originality.

Two tendencies are observable in those who, having studied this Discourse, have laid the results of their studies before the world. On the one hand, there are those who have ransacked ancient literature in order to discover sayings which resemble those of our Lord, who have found, or fancy they have found, that He was anticipated even in his most characteristic utterances, and who take a keen delight in announcing their conviction that He said nothing new, nothing which had not been said, and said as well, before He opened his lips. And, on the other hand, there are those who think they honour Him by affirming his teaching to be absolutely new, with no roots in the past, unparalleled, unprecedented, unanticipated—not a development of ancient wisdom, whether Heathen or Hebrew, but a wisdom which contradicted and reversed all that seers and sages had taught. We must be on our guard against both these tendencies, against both the conclusions in which they have landed men. To affirm that He was not in the world, nor in the thoughts of men, until He took flesh and dwelt among us, is no more to honour Him than it is to affirm that, when He came into the world, He shewed Himself to be no wiser than the men whose thoughts He had previously guided and inspired. It is not to honour Christ to maintain that He was not that “Light” by which the heathen sages caught glimpses of the truth and Hebrew seers gazed on it more steadfastly and continuously; nor is it to honour Him to maintain that “the Light of the world” was no brighter than his scattered and communicated beams. He *is* the Light of every man that cometh into the world,—the light of all their seeing; but, if all their light is from Him, is not He more than they? All that they knew of truth they learned of Him; but must not He, who is “the truth” itself, have more to teach us than they knew? His teaching we may be sure will not be new in the sense of having

no connection with the truths He had already taught by them ; but it will be new in this sense, that it will perfect that which in them was imperfect ; that it will gather up their scattered thoughts, free them from the errors with which they had blended them, and harmonize, develop, and complete them. That is to say, his teaching will be original, yet not original ; *original*, in that it will be pure, authoritative, complete ; *not original*, in that it will commonly claim and recover the lessons which He had aforetime moved men to utter, disentangle them from the intricate network of error which vitiated them, shake them loose from the dust that had gathered upon them, evolve their hidden stores of meaning and carry them to their proper perfection.

This indeed is precisely what He claims for Himself, and this is all that He claims. Nineteen centuries before we had formulated that doctrine of evolution of which we are just now so proud, He announced that his teaching was to be an evolution, a development and a fulfilment of the Law. "Think not," He said, "that I have come to destroy the law : I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Only such a destruction as is necessarily involved in development was contemplated by Him. From the beginning God had made known his will to men ; He had told them what they must be and do if they would rise to their true blessedness by becoming of one will with Him. In the earliest books of the Bible we find traces of a great primitive Tradition, known to Melchizedek as well as to Abraham, to Balaam as well as to Moses, to the Egyptians as well as to the Hebrews ; not confined to any one clan, but the common property of the human race. What Moses did was not to bring in a revelation wholly new, but to trace out and define the application of that primitive Tradition to the wants and circumstances of the Hebrew nation. And, in like manner, what

Christ did was not to bring in a revelation wholly new, distinct from and other than that formulated by Moses, but to trace out and define the application of the Law to the whole family of man. He resolved the Law, as ramified and applied by Moses, into its simplest and most spiritual elements, and then brought these simple spiritual elements to bear on the universal conscience, on all the varied aspects of human life and duty. When Moses took up the great primitive Tradition, which first conveyed the Will of God to man, he destroyed much—many idolatrous conceptions and immoral customs which had been entangled with it; nevertheless, his mission was not to destroy, but to fulfil—to detach the original Revelation from the errors which encrusted it, to purify and to expand it. And, in like manner, when Christ took up the Law which came by Moses, He destroyed much—much that was merely local and ceremonial and for a time; yet, none the less, his mission was not to destroy, but to fulfil—to carry out and complete the Revelation of the kind and holy will of God, to detach it from Hebrew as well as from Heathen incrustations, to set it free, to make it pure, luminous, influential, catholic. All development implies destruction of earlier and imperfect forms; yet development is not destruction but fulfilment. The seed is not destroyed, on the contrary its function is discharged, when it springs up into a plant or tree: the bud is not destroyed, its mission is accomplished, when it bursts into a flower: nor is the flower destroyed, although we no longer see it as a flower, when it becomes a fruit; rather, it has been developed into a higher form, its end has been attained. And even so the Lord Jesus did not destroy either the primitive religious Tradition some remnants of which still lingered in the heathen world, or the Mosaic Law which had been overrun and hidden beneath a rank growth of Rabbinical glosses and additions; on the contrary,

He came "to carry them forward by growth to the higher forms and the better fruit that were contained within them," to fulfil the ideals which they concealed as well as contained.

Nothing therefore can be more foolish and vain than the endeavour to detract from the originality of Christ's teaching by citing sentences like his, whether from heathen literature or from the Hebrew Scriptures. In claiming the thoughts of the sages and prophets who were before Him, He simply claimed his own; for whence did they derive them if not from Him, the Light of every man and the Glory of Israel? To reclaim these truths, to detach them from the connections which vitiated them, to carry them to their perfection, and to weave them into a large and harmonious whole, was the work which, as a Teacher, He came to do. And, therefore, we are not careful to deny, we are eager to admit, that many even of the most admirable sayings in the Sermon on the Mount had been anticipated by heathen moralists and poets. Confucius anticipated the Golden Rule when he summed up the whole duty of man in the single word, "*Reciprocity.*" Rabbin Hillel anticipated it still more exactly; for while the Lord Jesus said, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets," Hillel said: "*Do not unto another what thou wouldst not have another do unto thee; this is the whole law, the rest is mere commentary.*" If Christ bade us love, not "our brethren" only, but all men, even "the evil and the unthankful," the Greek sage Menander said: "*I am a man, and therefore nothing human is alien to me;*" Cicero, the Roman orator, said: "*Men were born for men, that each should assist the rest;*" and, again, "*Nature ordains that a man should wish the good of every man, whoever he may be, for the simple reason that he is a man;*" and Seneca both bade us "*confer benefits even on the unthankful,*" and "*give aid even to our enemies,*" and laid

down the rule : “ *Let us give as we would wish to receive.*” If Christ bids us “ Do the will of our Father who is in heaven,” Epictetus affirms that then only is man truly good and free “ *when whatever is the will of God is his will too, and whatever is not God’s will, is not his will.*” If Christ bids us “ forgive men their trespasses,” Epictetus advises us : “ Every matter has two handles : one of them will bear taking hold of, the other not. *If thy brother sin against thee, lay not hold of the matter by this, that he sins against thee ; for by this handle the matter will not bear taking hold of. But rather lay hold of it by this, that he is thy brother, thy born mate ; and thou wilt take hold of it by what will bear handling.*” If Christ warns us to “ take heed that we do not our righteousness before men,” that we may be seen and rewarded of them, Marcus Aurelius affirms that the perfect man, when he has done a service to another, “ *does not know what he has done, but he is like a vine which has produced grapes, and seeks for nothing more after it has produced its proper fruit. As a horse when he has run,*” he continues, “ a dog when he has caught the game, a bee when it has made its honey, so this man, when he has done a good act, *does not call out for others to come and see, but he goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce the grapes in season.*”

It would be easy to multiply similar quotations. It would not be impossible, perhaps, to find some parallel in the ancient heathen philosophers and poets for every leading thought in the Sermon on the Mount ; more than a dozen such parallels have been cited by Canon Lightfoot* from the writings of Seneca alone. And, therefore, we should only betray a pitiful lack of culture, or an impudent disregard of facts, were we to claim originality for this Dis-

* In his invaluable essay on “ *St. Paul and Seneca,*” appended to his Commentary on “ *The Epistle to the Philippians.*”

course in any sense which would imply that its noble and characteristic sayings had never been uttered till Christ opened his mouth. What we do claim for Him, what we can honestly claim for Him, is that He has never left Himself without witness among men; that it was He who, by his Spirit, gave these wise and true thoughts to the men who were before Him. And what we still further claim for Him is that, while in the Confucian Analects, in the Talmud, and in the works of the great writers and orators of Greece and Rome, these noble anticipations of his words are blended with much that is erroneous in thought and vicious in morality, and while, moreover, they received but a poor and halting commentary from the lives of those who uttered them, from the lips of Christ they come unmixed with any taint of vice or error; that He first made them ruling principles in the hearts and lives of men by supplying them with motives of an adequate force; and that He incarnated them "in the loveliness of perfect deeds," in the chaste and winning beauty of a blameless life. Compared with these large claims, it is but a small thing that we should assert the literary originality of Christ. Yet even this claim might be vindicated were it worth the while. Shakespeare borrowed much,—the plots of his dramas sometimes, and sometimes both the very characters which move through them and the very words they utter; and it can hardly be pretended that *he* inspired the chroniclers and poets who came before him. But does any sane man call Shakespeare's originality in question? If he had made the whole antecedent world of literature pay tribute to him, would he have gone beyond his clear right? Did he not pay back every loan with usury, and with an usury so enormous as to add almost infinitely to the value of that which he condescended to take? But for the teaching of Christ we may claim far more than this. We

may claim that He added quite infinitely to the worth of the sayings He borrowed from the lips of men; and that He only borrowed of them that which He Himself had first given them.

The Sermon on the Mount is original, then, and it is not original; it is all the more original because it makes no pretension to originality.

But if in this Discourse we find many sayings which had been anticipated, or partly and imperfectly anticipated, by the heathen poets and sages, we also find that the Divine Preacher took much more from the Hebrew Prophets and Psalmists, and that because He had given them more. They were *inspired* by Him, inspired to give a law which contained the statutes of life, and a promise of the advent of One in whom those statutes should receive a full obedience, his obedience giving the hope and assurance of obedience to mankind. And now that He had come to obey the law and to fulfil the promise, it was but natural that He should repeat and recast many of the words He had moved them to speak. Accordingly, throughout the Sermon we can see that "the law and the prophets" were in his mind, giving shape to his thoughts and words even when He does not openly cite them or refer to them. Any good reference Bible marks hundreds of passages in the Old Testament, the influence of which is felt in the successive sentences of this Discourse. Considerations of time and space forbid us to go through the whole series; and it will suffice for the purpose of our argument if we note only the Old Testament parallels to the opening sentences of the Sermon, the octave of Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," said Christ; "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." But David had said, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not de-

spise ;” and Isaiah had portrayed Jehovah as making and inhabiting two heavens—one, “the high and holy place,” and the other, “the poor and contrite spirit.” “Blessed are they that mourn,” said Christ ; “for they shall be comforted.” But Isaiah had long since promised to those who mourned in Zion, “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” “Blessed are the meek,” said Christ ; “for they shall inherit the earth.” But David had used the very same words before Him : “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” “Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” said Christ ; “for they shall be filled.” But Isaiah had invited as many as thirsted to come to the waters, even though they had no money, and as many as hungered to come and eat that which was good, instead of spending their money on that which was not bread. “Blessed are the merciful,” said Christ ; “for they shall obtain mercy.” But the Psalmist had said, “Blessed is he that sheweth mercy to the miserable ; the Lord will deliver him in the day of his misery.” “Blessed are the pure in heart,” said Christ ; “for they shall see God.” But David had warned the Congregation of Israel that only he who had “a pure heart” and clean hands, could ascend the true hill of the Lord and abide his holy presence. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” said Christ ; “for they shall be called the children of God.” But even in the old warlike times of Israel the children of God were exhorted to “seek peace and pursue it ;” they were taught that “the work of righteousness is peace ;” they had no higher promise than “an abundance of peace.” “Blessed,” said Christ, “are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake ;” and what was the whole story of the Jewish heroes and prophets but a commentary on the blessedness

of those who loved righteousness well enough to suffer for it?

In the Beatitudes, then, as in the whole Sermon, we find no truths absolutely new; the truths taught in them had been taught aforetime by the holy men of the Hebrew race. And yet, after all, was there not "a noble strangeness" in them, and even a striking originality? That they simply enunciate the choicest truths of "the law and the prophets" we frankly admit; but with the admission we couple the question, *Who*, till Christ spake, had discovered that *these* were the choice, the sovereign and ruling, truths? They were hidden away amid a mass of laws, maxims, ceremonial prescriptions. When He drew them forth from their obscurity, they were as fresh and strange to the Jews as they would have been to the very heathen. No man, heathen or Hebrew, so much as dreamed of acting on them; their lives were moulded on principles the very contrary to those which Christ pronounced to be the secrets of a blessed life. In uttering these Beatitudes, He may have been "sounding old bells," but He made the old bells ring a new tune, and ring in a new time. Sounded by Him, their tones fell clear and spirit-like, as from an upper purer world, on the proud and heated hearts of the blind followers of blind rabbinical guides.

Original! No, the Beatitudes are not original in the sense that nothing like them had ever been heard before: every one of them has its parallels in the scriptures of the Old Testament. Yet who but Christ would have been original enough to select *these* words out of the vast bewildering maze of Old Testament sayings? Who but He would have passed by all that men then most honoured and admired—wealth, pedigree, courage, power—to pronounce a blessing on the very qualities they most despised—on poverty, sorrow, meekness, aspiration, mercy, purity,

peace, persecution, and the hatred of men? When before did such a ragged crew of calamities and misfortunes find themselves mustered and renamed, set in the face of the sun, and compassed about with the Divine favour? If it be original in a moral teacher to ignore the qualities and aims which men admire and most eagerly pursue, and to lift to the very pinnacle of honour the aims and qualities which they most despise and dread, then we may fearlessly claim originality for Christ, though we admit that his Beatitudes were shaped by the influence of words which He had inspired the seers and poets of Israel to utter.

Nor is it difficult to see *why* the teaching of Christ is not original in the other sense, why it is not wholly new in conception and language. For, as one of the ablest of modern preachers has pointed out,* "all growth must spring from roots pre-existing in the soil. There can be no *new*, except by the help of some *old*." If the Lord Jesus had "spread out a novel field of unfamiliar truths" before the Jews, He might have led them to speculate and argue, but He could not have aroused their consciences by convicting them of sinning against the truth they already knew; He could not have made them ashamed of the narrowness of their thoughts and the sordidness of their lives, by applying to them a standard of thought and conduct which they admitted to be Divine. And, therefore, as it was his aim to arouse their consciences and amend their life, He sought to bring out the great spiritual truths contained in "the law and the prophets," to place them in the clearest light, and so to prepare the way for the still higher truths which as yet they were not able to receive.

By taking this course He gained a great and obvious ad-

* *Beecher*, in his "Life of Jesus the Christ," vol. i., chap. xiv. This and the two following paragraphs are simply a paraphrase or a citation from this fine work.

vantage. "He put himself in the confidence of his own people." They saw that He did not ask them to break with the past. They felt that He was a genuine Hebrew prophet, standing on the very ground which their fathers had occupied, and uttering truths with which they were familiar, while yet He gave them a scope, a force, and a spiritual elevation altogether new.

By taking this course He also avoided a great and obvious danger—that of plunging those who listened to Him into the depths of scepticism and moral indifference. "If men's moral beliefs were the result of a purely logical process, they might be changed upon mere argument, and with as little detriment to the moral nature as an astronomer experiences when, having recalculated a problem, he corrects an error." But men's beliefs spring from the heart as well as from the brain, and are often strangely independent of logic. Even if they have been argued into a certain creed and its corresponding form of worship, their creed and worship are soon covered all over with the associations of the household, with the fancies of childhood, the hopes and fears of manhood, the charities of domestic love. When this natural process has taken place, when a man's religion is blended with all that makes life fair and sacred to him, to change his religion is to reconstruct the man himself. Such a change is full of peril. "Only the strongest moral natures survive the shock of doubt which dispossesses them of all that they have trusted from childhood. Most men, when once they are cut loose from what they have always deemed sacred, find it impossible to transfer their reverence to new objects, and sink either into indifference or doubt. Nothing new can be safely given to men unless it preserves all that was valuable in the faith or the institution it supersedes. It is *the old in the new* which saves it from doing more harm than good."

So that if any ask why the Lord Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, why He affirmed that no jot or tittle of the law could ever pass away, why He warned us that, should we teach men to break even one, and that the least, of the old commandments, we should thereby condemn ourselves to the lowest place in his kingdom,—we reply: It was because He would not unsettle the minds of his hearers that He made no abrupt transition from Law to Gospel, that He shewed an invariable respect for the ancestral faith of those to whom He spake, that He handled their very prejudices with gentleness, insomuch that they felt his very rebukes of the Pharisaic glosses and traditions to be inspired by his love for the Law which was being corrupted and made void.

And in this, as in all else, we shall do well to follow Him,—to aim, as He aimed, at fulfilling rather than destroying. He came to reveal truth rather than to assail error, to win men to righteousness rather than to denounce their sins. Even in the worst, even in the outcast publican and the lawless harlot, He found a little goodness, and made it more by his recognition and approval of it. Men are not to be driven or denounced from evil; they may be won to good by kindness. We cannot curse their errors out of them; we may bring them to renounce their errors by blessing and serving them. Yet the method of denunciation comes naturally and easily to us. We are quick to detect evil, slow to recognize and commend that which is good, at least in others. We find it so much easier to condemn error than to live by the truth, to rebuke sin than to shew charity, that we are more prone to destroy than to fulfil. 'Tis a proneness that must be restrained if we are to breathe the spirit of our Master. The heretic is more likely to be restored, the doubter to beat his music out, the sinner to be reclaimed, if we lay hold of that which is good in them

and try to foster it, than by any logical assault that we can deliver against their errors, or any anathema that we can fulminate against their sins.

So, finally, in that interior rule over our own spirits which is our hard but noble and inevitable task, we should seek to fulfil rather than to destroy. Many, alas, are the imperfections which cleave to us, many the sins which pollute and degrade us. And, sometimes, in our endeavours to amend, we set ourselves definitely to resist a sin by which we are much beset, to subdue an evil affection by which we are often betrayed. Possibly we do well. But possibly we should do even better were we deliberately to cherish that which is good in us, and leave this to contend with the evil affection or habit. To fulfil the good is the best way to destroy the evil. If one would be in health, it is better to take food and exercise than to take medicine—though even the strongest of us must take medicine at times. And our spiritual health and soundness depend rather on our souls being fed by a constant fellowship with God, and trained by an habitual obedience to his will, than by our direct attempts to cure this disordered function or that.

II.

Prayer.

IN Psalm lxxii. 20, we read : “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.” But they were *not* ended, as it is easy to shew. The Hebrew Psalter is divided into five books, five separate collections, made at wide intervals, each of which closes with a doxology.* These books contain psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, composed during five hundred years, or, if we include the Prayer of Moses, the man of God (Psalm xc.), during a thousand years, from the time of the Exodus down to that of the Return from the Captivity in Babylon. The first book includes Psalms i.-xli., most of which were probably written by David, and was edited by Solomon, his son. The second book, or collection, includes Psalms xlii.-lxxii., and was probably arranged by “the men of Hezekiah.”† It contains a series of Psalms by “the sons of Korah,” written long after the time of David, and another series by David himself. The motive which led the editors of this second collection to issue it was probably this : that they had discovered certain psalms composed by “the sweet singer of Israel” which were omitted from the first collection. For these they had

* See, for example, Psa. lxxii. 18, 19.

† Prov. xx. 1 ; and 2 Chron. xxix. 30.

made diligent search, recovering them perhaps from the memories of ancient men who had often sung them in the Temple, or from the Temple manuscripts. So diligent had been their search, that when they closed it, they believed that no single psalm of David's had escaped them, that they had gleaned every ear in this large and fertile field, leaving nothing for any that should come after them. And hence they appended to their collection the note, "*The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended ;*" i.e., "There are no more of them anywhere to be found." In this conclusion, however, they were mistaken. Other psalms of David still lived in the memories of men whom they had not been able to consult, and more than a dozen of these psalms were afterwards recovered and inserted in the subsequent "books" of the Psalter.

But it is not to this, or to any other mere point of criticism, that I now wish to call attention. I take this editorial note, this "Finis," appended to the second book of the Psalter, simply as a point of departure for a few words on the true conception of prayer. For some years now the efficacy of prayer has been much in dispute, more especially since certain well-known professors, whose learning and devotion to the truths of Science deserve and command universal respect, publicly challenged as many as believe in the efficacy of prayer to put its efficacy to an accurate and decisive test. For themselves, however, they had forestalled the result of the experiment. From facts and figures at their command, they had proved, at least to their own satisfaction, that under the reign of fixed and invariable laws there is no room for prayer, or at least no possibility of answers to such prayers as men commonly offer. With a strange and lamentable misapprehension of the kind of verification of which prayer admits, they sought to reduce it to a question of statistics, to tabulate the results of a

spiritual communion with the Father of our spirits as men tabulate the exports and imports of commerce, or the ravages of an infectious disease. And since that challenge was published and declined—and there was no option but to decline a challenge so absurdly inappropriate—this question of the efficacy of prayer has been much and often in debate. It is well that it should be debated, well for the world, especially well for the Church. Whatever the result of the debate so far as men of science are concerned, it should, at least, have the effect of giving *us* both a larger and a truer conception of what prayer is.

And before we blame *them* for their narrow and inadequate conception of what prayer is and does, let us ask ourselves whether *we* are not in large measure responsible for their misconception of it? If we, we of the Church, regard, or if we have long regarded, prayer as simply, or mainly, a solicitation for certain definite and calculable gifts, a mere asking for things that we want and have not, can we wonder that those who stand aloof from the Church, even if they do not oppose themselves to it, should regard it in the same way, and propose to put it to a test which, on that conception of it, would be a very suitable and decisive one? And yet *is* not this even now the ruling conception of prayer in the Church, the conception held by a large majority of its members—that we ask certain temporal and spiritual gifts of God: as health, fair weather, good harvests, children, prosperity, protection from danger; or happiness, wisdom, faith, love, joy, peace: and that, when we rightly ask, He gives us the very thing we have asked Him for? If this be the ruling conception of prayer in the mind of the Church, as I fear it still is, we should feel no surprise when men of a logical and practical turn, assuming this conception to be the true one, pronounce it to be logically absurd and self-contradictory, and challenge us to put it

to the proof. On this hypothesis they gain an easy and an assured victory. For such a conception of prayer really takes the world from under the rule of God, to place it at the mercy of men's variable and conflicting desires. Such a conception involves the logical absurdity that two different men may ask that the same thing should, and should not, happen at the same moment of time, and both get what they ask. A conception so inadequate and self-opposed *ought* to be brought to a conclusive test; and even the test of statistics can hardly be said to be inappropriate to it.

We cannot fairly blame men of science, therefore, for exposing the absurdity of such a conception. If we venture to blame them at all, it is that they should ever have been content to accept as true a conception of prayer so unscriptural, since they of all men should be the first to verify the facts and conceptions submitted to them, and should either decline to speak of prayer at all, or satisfy themselves that they are dealing with the sacred reality itself, and not with some dark and distorted shadow of it. And some at least of their followers may be open to this further censure, that they strike the staff of prayer from feeble hands long accustomed to lean on it with a somewhat inhumane air of eagerness and triumph. When the editors of the second book of the Psalter wrote "The prayers of David are ended," I can well believe they wrote it sadly, though all they meant was, "No more of these exquisite strains will be given to the world." But, at least among the camp-followers of science, there are some who now cry, "The prayers of the Church are ended," not sorrowfully, but as exultingly as prematurely, though *they* mean, "We have shewn prayer to be so absurd that no sane man can any longer lean upon God." It would almost seem, in fact, that these gentlemen cherish an ungentle grudge against whatever is too fine, too ethereal, too

spiritual to be seen and handled, weighed in their balance, decomposed by their analysis, and tabulated in their records. Such a spirit, however, is at the farthest remove from the truly scientific spirit, as it is also from the Christian spirit, which indeed are closely akin the one to the other. Instead, therefore, of meeting scorn with scorn, and boast with boast, we shall do well (1) to seek a true and lofty conception of prayer; (2) to assure ourselves of the "sweet reasonableness" of our conception; (3) to shew that the reign of law, so far from being fatal to prayer, is really our main incentive to it; and (4) to define the true limits of prayer.

I. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPTION OF PRAYER.

That the current conception of prayer is too colourless, too limited, too unspiritual, may be shewn quite as clearly from a devout study of Scripture as by the most rigorous use of logic. The Psalms of David are called "the *prayers*" of the son of Jesse. The song of Hannah,* a song as blithe and glad as that of a bird, is introduced by the phrase, "And Hannah *prayed*, and said." The ode of Habakkuk,† than which there is no more sublime poem in the whole range of Hebrew literature, is expressly entitled, "A *prayer* of Habakkuk the Prophet." And these psalms, songs, odes, are by no means limited to the forms and tones of supplication; in some of them there is not so much as a single petition or request. They sweep the whole gamut of human thought and emotion. They contain profound meditations on human life, and on the varying spiritual moods of the human heart. They depict the grandest and the sweetest scenes in Nature, and even busy themselves with the pro-

* I Sam. ii. 1-10.

† Hab. iii.

ducts of Art. They record the most momentous events in the history of man. They seek to track the course and penetrate the mysteries of the Divine Administration. They enter, with priestly foot, into the innermost recesses of the Sanctuary not made with hands, and engage in an informal but intimate communion with the unseen God, offering before Him the sacrifices of a contrite spirit, vows of dedication to his service, and songs of sustained and various praise. They are heavy with sighs ; they glow with rapture. They are overcast with nights of weeping ; they are bright and calm with fruitful days of peace. They are steeped in the kindling hues of imagination ; they ring with poetic cadences that chime like sweet bells in tune. As we study them, and remember that they are *prayers*, prayers uttered by the most spiritual of men, nay, in some sense, prayers inspired by God Himself, we cannot but feel that *our* prayers are hardly worthy of the name, so much do they lack colour, motion, variety, breadth, fire. We learn from them that prayer is by no means only the utterance of desire in the simplest words that human lips can use ; that it is not always even a direct appeal to the almighty Father and Lover of souls ; that it is never a mere asking for gifts, and still less a resolute and importunate insistence that what we ask shall be given us. It is other, and more, and better than all this. It is often mainly a devout meditation on God, on the wonders He has wrought, on the heavens which declare his glory, on the earth which is full of his goodness, on the large principles on which He conducts his providence and the illustrious deeds by which He has revealed his saving and perfect will, on the constitution, needs, infirmities, capacities, and aspirations of men and their manifold relations to Him who made and redeems them. Prayer, when at least it is formed on the model of the Psalms, is meditation—a meditation on natural and

moral verities conducted under a reverent and stimulating sense of that Divine Presence which works in and through them all, the Shekinah of the inner temple, the Divine Fire which shines through the cloud of our imperfect conceptions. In a word, it is *thinking with God in all our thoughts*. And, at times, our thoughts will or may be full of colour, glow, passion; the light that was never seen on sea or shore will suffuse and tinge them; as we seek to utter them, our words, like all impassioned speech, will break into cadence and rhythm. Hannah, made joyful by the gift of a man-child, simply exults in the God whose motto, like that of the Roman empire, she takes to be,

Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos.

She flings up her whole soul in praise of Him who kills and gives life, who maketh poor and maketh rich, who bringeth low and lifteth up: she asks absolutely nothing for herself and her son, she does not prefer a single request: and yet her song is *a prayer*. Habakkuk, his fine imagination quickened to its utmost force by an inspiration from on high, glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven: he sees God rising like a sun over the mountains of Sinai, tipping range after range, crag after crag, with fire; again he sees Him riding on the wings of a tempest beneath which the earth quakes and the mountains crumble into dust, passing in fury across the earth to smite the sea, that He may make a pathway for his people, and to stamp down the nations which set themselves against them. What he can apprehend of the Divine Majesty he sets down in words that breathe and burn.

The mountains see Thee; they writhe:
The rain-torrent sweepeth along:
The abyss lifteth up its voice,
It flingeth its hands on high:

Sun and moon draw back into their habitations
 At the light of Thine arrows shooting by,
 At the lightning-splendours of Thy spear.

As he recalls the Divine manifestation, so splendid, so terrible, yet so gracious, the Prophet resolves that, come what may, he will trust and rejoice in the God of salvation, and entreats Jehovah to revive and continue his work of redemption. And this sublime ode, which is mainly a theophany, and which contains only a single petition, is expressly called "*A Prayer.*"

Judging, then, by the prayers of the Old Testament, we should conclude that prayer is by no means mainly an importunate asking for gifts; that it is mainly a devout meditation on the character, works, providence of God, and on our relations to Him, this meditation waking all the chords of emotion in our souls, and uttering itself in fervid and impassioned speech.

And this conception of prayer is confirmed by the Scriptures of the New Testament. If the holy apostles assure us that in the days of his flesh the Lord Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears;" * if they affirm that his Spirit maketh intercession for us "with ineffable sighs;" † they also record prayers in which we find both the same elevated and impassioned tone and the same tone of sustained and devout meditation which, as we have seen, characterize the prayers of the Old Testament prophets. If, at one time, they set the Son of Man before us as crying in the agony of abandonment, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" at another time they describe Him as singing, in a rapture of grateful joy, "I confess unto Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that, hiding these things from the wise and prudent, Thou

* Heb. v. 7.

† Rom. viii. 26.

hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." * But it is when we consider the more prolonged utterances of Him who prayed without ceasing, and in everything gave thanks, that we gain our best conception of what is meant by prayer. And of these we can take no nobler and more conclusive instance than the litany known as "the Intercessory Prayer," and recorded in John xvii. In this sublime litany beyond a doubt there are many petitions. The Son asks much of the Father—asks that He Himself may be glorified, that his disciples may be kept from the world and sanctified by the truth, and that all who believe through their word may become "one" with God, genuine partakers of the Divine Nature. But the first and the most lasting impression which this prayer makes upon us as we read it is, that we are listening to a Divine meditation. We feel that, in the presence of the Father, the Son of God is *thinking*—thinking of the work He came to do, and of how He shall finish it, and of the issues of that redeeming work in days to come. He recalls the power with which He had been endowed from on high, and the use He had made of it. He is conscious that He has quickened an eternal life in many hearts. He pauses to define eternal life, to reflect on his complex relations to his Father and to his disciples, on the sanctifying power of the word of truth, on the conflict and toil which awaited as many as should believe on his Name, on the love which will be their stay and comfort under all the sorrows of time, and on the unclouded and eternal glory into which they will rise when time shall be no more. In short, this great prayer is a meditation, thrown into the petitionary form, on the

* Matt. xi. 25, 26, where it is instructive to note how this "prayer" shades off, in *Verse 27*, into a meditation on the relations of the Father, and the Son, and of both to men ; and in *Verses 28-30*, into a pathetic strain of invitation to the weary and heavy-laden.

facts and verities of the spiritual kingdom; a prayer more tender, more lofty, more devout, than any we find in the Psalms: and if it does not burn with the glowing hues of passion and imagination, it breathes a sacred and divine calm more potent than the most impassioned moods and the most musical cadences of poetic speech.

Even "the Lord's prayer," which is both a form and a model of Christian prayer, is not, nor does it warrant, an importunate solicitation for personal or temporal gifts. It holds, indeed, to the petitionary form throughout. But it contains only one request for outward good—the prayer for daily bread. And this solitary request is for the very simplest necessity of life; not for rich and sumptuous fare, but for the bare food without which we die. Even this solitary petition is redeemed from all selfishness by its very wording, since even in asking for bread we have to ask a supply for our neighbour's need as well as for our own. And, moreover, it comes after, and is subordinate to, the earlier and greater petitions—"Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done;" so that, even in asking for bare bread, we virtually profess our entire willingness to go without it, *i.e.*, to die, if, by dying, we may help to hallow God's name, or advance the interests of his kingdom, or cause his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

With these New Testament prayers in our minds—and it would be easy to add many more, such as the *Magnificat*, the *Nunc dimittis*, and, above all, the prayers with which St. Paul's Epistles abound—it is impossible that we should conceive of prayer as simply an asking, an insisting on the supply of our real or supposed wants. It is, rather, the movement and uprisal of all the faculties and affections of the soul towards God as our home, our satisfaction, our rest, our joy. It may take the form of a tender, sustained, devout meditation on God, on what He is, what He does, how He stands

affected towards us ; or of a mournful, passionate, persistent quest after Him ; or of a rapturous outburst of joyful praise because we have found Him and are at one with Him ; as well as the form of earnest supplication for a supply of our own wants, or of a generous intercession for the sins and needs of our fellows. It may put on all the changeful colours of the soul ; but its one unvarying distinction is, that it is a sincere, thoughtful, spiritual communion and intercourse with the Father of our spirits, in whom we live.

And thus, in its better moments, the Church has always understood it. Perhaps the grandest of uninspired prayers, if it be uninspired, is the *Te Deum*, the early clauses of which are as truly prayerful as the later. According to the Biblical conception, we as truly pray when we praise the Father everlasting, when we exult that all angels, cherubim and seraphim, the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world, acknowledge and praise Him ; or when we meditate on the Father of an infinite majesty, the everlasting Son, the Holy Ghost the Comforter, or the incarnation, passion, and ascension of our Lord ; as when we beseech God to have mercy on us, to save us, to keep us without sin, and to number us with his saints in glory everlasting. Any conception of prayer that would exclude these lofty meditations, or these joyful grand-toned outbursts of praise, is too colourless, too narrow, too faint and poor. It lacks the wide scope, the generous ardour, the sustained power, the play of memory and thought, of passion and imagination, which characterize the prayers of the Bible.

Moreover, the prevailing conception of prayer in the Church is as much too *unspiritual* as it is too narrow and colourless and cold. It is because we have too long regarded it as a mere asking for definite, for personal, and even for

temporal gifts, that some are now sneering at prayer as only "a machine warranted by theologians to make God do what his clients want." Such a sneer would have had no force had the current conception of prayer been more Biblical, *i.e.*, more philosophical and more spiritual. And indeed it has but little force even as it is. For defective as the common conception may be, we all admit, so often as we truly pray, that we know not what things to ask for till we are taught by the Spirit of God, and refer ourselves to his higher and perfect wisdom. We know and are sure that God desires our real welfare, the welfare of our spirits, and that of all men; but, nevertheless, we admit that even in imploring spiritual gifts we must not prescribe to his Wisdom nor insist on receiving the very things for which we ask. It is a commonplace of the Church, a mere and recognized truism, that all our prayers run up into and really mean, "Thy will, not ours, be done." We are perpetually citing illustrations of it from the life of our Lord and of his chief apostle. Christ Himself besought, we say, that, if it were possible, the cup of agony and shame might pass from Him; the cup did not pass: but was not his prayer answered when an angel appeared out of heaven to strengthen Him? St. Paul thrice besought the Lord that he might be delivered from "the thorn" or rather from the "stake," in his flesh; he was left to endure his infirmity unrelieved: but was not his prayer answered when, assured of a sufficient grace, he was able to rejoice in his very infirmity? We talk glibly of "the misery of a granted prayer." We confess that God gives us "the desire of our hearts" if He does with us and for us, not what we ask, but what He knows to be best. Some of us even take up the great passage in the Gospels* on the efficacy of prayer, beginning, "Ask, and it shall be given you," and find in it a new argument for spirituality and deference to

* Matt. vii. 7-11.

the will of God in our supplications. We observe that, while St. Matthew represents our Lord as saying, "How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give *good things* to them that ask Him," St. Luke* reports Him as saying, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give *the Holy Spirit* to them that ask him;" and we argue and admit, "Yes, after all, this pure Divine Spirit is the sum and substance of all good; if God give us the Holy Spirit, in that He does verily give us all good things."

All this is very simple, very easy—to talk about. But do we believe it, and act upon it? What are our own prayers like? Are they calm and sustained meditations on the character, works, and ways of God, and his varied, yet ever gracious relations to men? Are they passionate confessions of our alienation from Him, and passionate yet steadfast endeavours to return to Him and to lift our weak wayward wills into accord with his righteous will? Are they rapturous outbursts of grateful song, in which we summon our soul and all that is within us to a loving and happy contemplation of his goodness, and celebrate his praise in forms and hues borrowed from a kindled imagination and an adoring heart? Or are they only, or mainly, an importunate solicitation that we may take our own way, choose our own gifts, and be enriched with temporal and spiritual blessings at our own will? Are they even less and worse than this—a cold and formal recitation of our wants and desires, fresh with no play of thought, bright with no expectation of good; or even a perpetual and querulous lamentation over our infirmities and needs, and God's reluctance to supply our needs and strengthen our hearts?

Surely it is *we* who are to blame if the world misconceives the very idea of prayer! Only as we heartily adopt the broad Biblical conception and act upon it, only as we form a more

* Luke xi. 13.

adequate, a more vivid and spiritual, conception of it, and enter into a sincere and cordial fellowship with our Father in heaven, shall we put the efficacy of prayer to a decisive test, and find it abundantly verified.

II. THE REASONABLENESS OF PRAYER.

“Every one that asketh, receiveth,” affirms the Son of God. “Nay,” reply certain of our modern teachers, “no one who asks, receives.” If we inquire on what the first affirmation is based, the Lord Jesus virtually replies, “On what I know of our Father who is in heaven, your Father and mine.” If we ask on what the second affirmation is based, our modern teachers reply, either, “On what we have learned of God by the researches and discoveries of Science ;” or, “On the fact we have discovered, that there is no God to hear and answer prayer.” As we think of God, then, so we think of prayer. And yet even those who think truly and nobly of God, who believe that they have seen all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, are often troubled with doubts and misgivings. As they listen to the confident, the too confident and dogmatic, assertions of men whom they honour for their generous ardour and unselfish devotion in the service of scientific truth, their faith in prayer is often weakened and overcast, even though it be not destroyed. Is there, then, any real and adequate cause for their secret uneasiness? Has modern thought any arguments to urge of such a force that we do well to question, or distrust, the efficacy of prayer?

The great modern argument against prayer is this:—We everywhere find the reign of law ; *i.e.*, God, if there be a God, rules the universe and the affairs of men in certain fixed and invariable modes : how then can we hope, or wish,

that He should violate these laws, which ensure the general welfare, in order to shew special favour to this man or that, to supply his want, or to gratify his desire? Time was when it was pardonable that men should pray for rain or for fair weather, for health or abundant harvests ; but it is no longer rational of them now that the scientific idea of law has been proclaimed. We know that rain is the product of atmospheric laws which, under certain conditions, render it inevitable. We know that health and disease are the results of physiological laws, which absolutely determine that one man shall live and another die. The idea that rain and death are dependent on the will of a Being who can avert or precipitate them at his pleasure, is, therefore, utterly unscientific and irrational ; it belongs to the days when broad margins of human life and thought lay in a gross darkness, peopled, by the popular imagination, with the caprices of an omnipotent Will ; just as in the ancient maps large unknown tracts of the earth were depicted as the haunts of chimeras dire and monstrous forms of life. But now, darkness has given place to light, the monstrous to the natural, caprice to law, confusion to order ; and we can no longer believe that, by our prayers, we change that perfect Will which works out the welfare of the universe by methods as fixed and invariable as Itself.

This, I believe, is a fair and candid statement of the chief modern objection to prayer. And it is very obvious to remark that it goes upon a very limited, a very unphilosophical and un-Biblical, conception of what prayer is. It assumes prayer to be mainly, if not solely, an asking for certain personal and temporal gifts which can only be granted by suspending or violating the ascertained laws of the universe, by disturbing the physical sequences which Science pronounces to be unalterable. But such a conception of prayer is as unscriptural as it is inadequate. If we

study the prayers recorded in the Old and New Testaments we find, as we have seen, that prayer is by no means only an asking for what we have not got ; it is also, it is rather, a spiritual communion with the Father of our spirits, a tender, sustained, devout meditation on Him, on his works, his providence, on our relations to Him and his purposes concerning us : it is a meditation surcharged with emotion, and which tends therefore to run into the most impassioned moods of thought and utterance. And, moreover, from the whole Biblical teaching on prayer, we may infer that, so far from being an endeavour to change the Divine Will, and to adjust it to our personal and varying desires, it is rather a sincere and strenuous endeavour to adopt that Will, and to bring our actions, aims, desires, into a free and happy accord with its volitions.

It is because we, we of the Church, have not risen to the large, generous, spiritual conception of prayer which the Bible teaches and implies, that at least one of the many modern schools of thought has, first, misconceived the very idea of prayer ; then challenged us to put it to an inappropriate test ; and has, last of all, defied us to prove that it is capable of producing the results we expect from it. Our first duty and endeavour, therefore, should be to revise, to raise and enlarge, our conception of prayer, until it squares with that of the sacred Volume from which we profess to derive it.

But when we have reached this point, it will surely be said :—“Granting that the common conception of prayer is too limited, too colourless, too unspiritual ; granting that prayer is *much more* than a mere asking for what we wish to have and have not got ; still does it not *include* asking and receiving, asking even for personal and temporal gifts, and much more for ‘the gifts of the Spirit’?” Does not the very Bible itself bid us ask that we may have, and seek that

we may find, and knock that the door of the Divine bounty may be opened to us?

Assuredly it does. If I say that a man is not only rich, but also good and kind, and imply that it is better to be kind and good than to be rich, I do not thereby deny that he is rich; I affirm it. And, in like manner, when I say that prayer is not a mere asking, but also a communion with God and a meditation on his works and ways, and imply that to meditate on Him and to commune with Him is even better than to ask Him for gifts, I do not thereby deny, I rather affirm that prayer includes petition for such things as we have need of.

“Well, but under this modern scientific conception of the invariable and universal reign of law, of God as ruling according to certain unalterable methods and sequences, what scope is left for such prayers as these? Is it not, as we are told, irrational to believe that God will depart from his established modes of action in order to shew us a special kindness or minister to our individual needs?”

It is by no means irrational, I reply; nay, it is irrational, rather, *not* to bring even our personal and temporal wants before God by prayer and supplication. Prayer is entirely reasonable, if only it be rightly understood. But if any man ask me still further, “Can you *prove* the reasonableness of prayer?” I can only answer, “I will try.”

1. Consider, then, that quite apart from any suspension or infraction of law, *God may answer many of our prayers by the influence He exerts on our own wills.* Of the two, we are more dependent on that which is within us than on that which is without us. Character tells more profoundly on our happiness and well-being than our external conditions. It is better to be wise than to be rich, and better to be good than to be wise. A change wrought upon our disposition does more for us than a change of circumstance. To raise and

sweeten our mood is better than to put money in our purse. A happy lover meets fate and change in an armour of proof which a loveless millionaire might well envy him, and still more those unhappy persons who are too great to be loved. That sincere trust in God which really saves a man from care for the morrow is worth more than the most ample and sumptuous provision for to-morrow, since that very provision is quite capable of becoming only a new care to us. Every one must have observed that the very same words, the very same tasks, the very same set of circumstances and events, produce the most different and opposite effects on different men, nay, even on the same man in different moods; and every thoughtful and experienced person must have discovered that there is a sunshine of the soul far more capable of irradiating and transfiguring the world than the meridian light of the sun, and an inner darkness to which that of night is bright as day. And in these common facts of human life and experience we have a wide scope for answers to prayer—above all, for answers to those prayers on which, if we are wise, we lay the keenest emphasis, the prayers which relate to character, to inner well-being. If God touch the springs of thought and emotion within us, He may often give us all we need and ask, without so much as putting a new accent over a single iota of our outward lot. Let Him but shed a new or an intenser light into the secret recesses of our nature, the light of a truthful, a patient, or a cheerful spirit, and the whole world is effectually changed for us, though to all but us it remain unchanged. Take the familiar example of St. Paul. He was smitten with an infirmity which, as he thought, made him despicable in the eyes of men. He loathed it, for he assumed that it impaired his usefulness, impeded the work of his apostleship.* It kept him in an agony so sharp that he compares it to that of a miserable

* Gal. iv. 14.

wretch impaled on a stake. Again and again he prayed that he might be delivered from it ; and the only answer to his prayer was an inward assurance that, so far from impeding him, his infirmity should aid him in his work, by letting the Divine strength shine the more manifestly through him. No physical change is wrought upon him. It is only his spirit that is touched and changed. And yet his whole world instantly grows bright to him ; he glories in that whereof he was once ashamed, and is "glad" to bear the very infirmity which had seemed to him an agony not to be borne.

2. But if God may answer many of our prayers by influencing our own wills, *He may answer many more by influencing the wills of our neighbours.* Consider how dependent we are on one another, and especially on those who stand nearest to us, for the dignity, the sweetness, the comfort, and the purity of our lives. Our peace of mind, the whole comfort of our life, may hang on their tempers and moods. Their disposition towards us may seriously affect our very circumstances, and must still more seriously affect our happiness. Few questions are of graver moment to us than how they stand affected towards us. We see ourselves in our neighbours' eyes, and are elated or depressed as they think well or ill of us. In our dealings with a man of business, it may make little difference to the gains we derive from our traffic with him whether or not he be of a frank, honourable, kindly nature ; but what a difference it makes to *us* ! In our social intercourse, our relations to our families, our servants, our neighbours and friends, how much our welfare and happiness depend on their moral character, their truthfulness or untruthfulness, their reliableness or unreliableness, their good or ill will toward us ! The substance of our prayers for ourselves is, I suppose, that we may become wise, good, useful, tranquil,

happy ; and who does not see how largely these prayers may be answered, quite apart from miracle, simply by a Divine influence on the hearts of our kinsfolk and acquaintance ?

There is a capital illustration of the extent to which the lot and fortune of men are affected, simply by impressions produced on their minds, and on the minds of those with whom they have to do, in the story of Gideon.* God comes to him in the night, according to the ancient chronicler, and bids him go down with "the three hundred" against the vast camp of Midian. But the brave Judge hesitates ; the crisis is great, the summons sudden and unexpected. As he hangs in poise God says to him, "If thou fear to attack them, go down secretly to the outskirt of the camp, and mark what thou shalt hear." Gideon steals down the hill under cover of the darkness, and approaches the nearest tent of the alien host. As he crouches by it and listens, he hears two soldiers talking. One of them is telling a dream to his comrade. "I dreamed," he says, "that a thin round barley-cake rolled down the hill, and tumbled against tent after tent of the camp—tent after tent falling before its onset, till the whole camp lay prostrate on the earth. What do you make of that, comrade?" His fellow answered him : "What I make of it is this. The barley-cake which came rolling down the hill, and upset the tents, stands for Gideon the Hebrew and his half-starved band. The gods have forewarned you that, sooner or later, they will smite and destroy our host." As he listens to the dream, and the interpretation thereof, Gideon takes fire. He returns to his camp, rouses the three hundred, and proves the poor visionary Midianite a true prophet. Now if Gideon had prayed, as perhaps he did, that the host of Midian should be given

* Judges vii.

into his hand, one of our modern teachers, could he have been there, might have stepped up to him and said, "Pooh, nonsense, man; you are asking a miracle of Him who acts only by fixed laws! God is always on the side of the bigger battalions. Get a larger army, drill it better, arm it better, command it better, and then indeed you may hope to conquer the host of Midian." Yet, simply by influencing the mind of one man through the dream related by another, God as truly gave the host of Midian into the hand of Gideon as though He had wrought a thousand miracles.

In the influence of the Divine Will, then, on the wills of men, there is scope, there is large and free scope, for prayer and for answers to prayer.

To this conclusion, however, it will be objected by those whose argument I am trying to meet: "But God acts and rules by law *in the spiritual* as well as in the natural *world*; his methods are as fixed and invariable in morals as in physics. He influences the minds and wills of men, not in response to their wishes or supposed needs, but in accordance with the eternal counsels of his perfect Will."

I reply: "You have not *proved* that yet. You have tried, indeed, to deduce moral laws from the facts of human life; but God's action on the wills of men is so much more immediate, flexible, various, and recondite, than his action in the physical universe, that you have not been able to discover and formulate the laws by which it is governed."

To this reply, however, they will probably respond: "Still, if we admit *that*, must not you admit that the whole set of modern thought and discovery runs in the direction of law, order, developement, and renders it probable that God does act by law even where we cannot formulate and prove the laws on which He acts? Must you not at least

admit that we rise to a loftier conception of the Divine Nature if we conceive of God as ruling the spirits of men, as He rules physical sequences, by laws so wise that He need never depart from them? And if this conception of God, as ruling in all regions of the universe by law, be the loftier, must it not be the truer also? Are we not sure that our greatest thoughts of the infinite and eternal Ruler of the universe must be the truest and the best?"

And to this I reply, Assuredly we are. And *if* your conception of God be the highest possible to man, doubtless it is also the truest. But I have a still higher conception of Him to suggest.

3. For *even in the province of physical sequences*, in the region which is confessedly under the reign of law, *there may be answers to prayer which yet are not miraculous*. Here are two conceptions of God—the scientific and the religious—and we have to determine which is the greater of the two. According to the teachings of Science, God is the first great Cause, *Causa causans*; his power extends throughout the universe: and because He is of a perfect wisdom and a perfect goodness, He acts on impartial and invariable laws in every province of his activity, thus securing the universal welfare. Now this conception is so noble and so true, that no thoughtful man can well reject it, or seek to impair its force. And yet, if it be held alone, does it not present God before us in the unlovely aspect of a pedant or a Pharisee, as the slave of his own methods; a willing slave indeed, keeping within self-imposed limits for a beneficent and noble end, but yet the slave of his own methods, the creature of his own habits? Is *this* the ultimate bound, the highest summit, of thought? Can we frame no loftier, and therefore truer, conception of the Most High, since we have agreed that the loftiest must also be the truest? Consider what I have called the religious conception of Him. Con-

ceive a Being of boundless power, wisdom, goodness, who has indeed, and who freely uses, his own fixed and invariable methods of action, on the one hand ; and who, on the other hand, has the fluctuating, various, and conflicting wills of his innumerable creatures to train and purify. Conceive of Him as so adjusting the one to the other that by his use and observance of invariable laws He works out the highest possible good of each of his creatures through all the ages of time, that He meets their ever-varying and to us incalculable needs, and either satisfies or denies the very desires of their hearts as may be best for them. Is not this a still nobler and loftier conception of God than the other? Some man may say, "Perhaps it is ; but still it is an impossible conception." "Impossible !" I reply ; "why you and I have conceived it. Is it impossible, then, that God should be as great as we can think Him to be? Must He not be indefinitely greater? Have we not agreed that our loftiest conception of God must be the truest, simply because it is the loftiest?"

To say that God cannot so administer his laws, moral and physical, as to answer our prayers, as to give or withhold what we ask of Him as may be best for us, is virtually to set limits to his power, or his wisdom, or his goodness, which we have granted to be illimitable. Once admit that God *is*, and that He is infinitely wise and good and strong, and from this single premise we may logically infer the efficacy of Christian prayer. If God be, and be what we hold Him to be, He *can* answer prayer, without a miraculous interference, simply by administering the laws of his eternal wisdom and grace.

4. But we may reasonably contend still further, that *occasions may rise when, for the greater good of his suppliant creatures, God will even work miracles in answer to prayer.* Why should it be thought a thing incredible that the invisible

Cause of that manifold effect we call Nature should become visible? why should we deem it impossible for Him to shine through the veil of cosmical forces behind which He is commonly concealed, and compel men to say, "This is He who is always working in all"? If the laws by which He rules in earth and heaven be not external forces within which He sits imprisoned, but simply the methods by which He commonly acts for the good of the universe, why should He not, if there be a sufficient cause, if He can thus promote the greater good of the universe, come forth from his hidden sanctuary to shew Himself to men, to let them *see* Him doing what He is for ever doing unseen? To say that He cannot, on the ground that to work a miracle He must suspend the laws which He had before enacted, is to fall into two errors, of which it is hard to say which is the more unscientific. The first error is that we limit the Inhabitant of Eternity by that law of succession by which our thoughts are bound, and make Him a creature of time. If I determine to spend every day of the next year in a certain invariable order, and then, six months hence, resolve to spend one day in a different way, no doubt I traverse my original determination, I change my mind. But with God no such self-contradiction is possible, since with Him there is no succession of thoughts and resolves. He is the "I AM," the Eternal, and sits high above all time and change. All things are always present to his mind—the exception as well as the rule, the miracle as well as the law: one is not before the other, nor against the other.

And the second error of this conception is that it holds the free activity of God to be limited by his laws, as though they were independent of his will, instead of expressions of his will—an error best refuted by our own daily experience. A wise and good father has rules by which he guides his own life, and his intercourse with his household; but can he not,

without violating these rules, listen to his children's requests ; *show* them what he is doing for them always, and why he cannot give them what they ask ; infuse a cheerful courage into their breasts when they have to do without what they wished to have ; and at times both grant them what they desire and enhance the value of his gift by the thoughtful and tender kindness with which it is bestowed ? And shall not our Father in heaven be at least as free as the father of our flesh, and yet as observant of order and rule ? *How* God should be both free and yet bound by law, is indeed a mystery which as yet transcends our thoughts. But the blending of free-will and necessity in the nature of man, the fact that he is always free and yet never free, is a mystery equally insoluble. Because of this mystery which our reason cannot grasp, this paradox which we cannot resolve and reconcile, we do not deny either that man is free to choose his own path, or that his path is necessarily determined for him. We admit both as facts, and wait till we are wiser for the large truth which is to reconcile them. Why, then, should we deny either that God is free to listen to and answer our requests, or that, in all He does, He acts according to the law of his eternal wisdom ? The mystery is simply the old *true* paradox of Free Will and Necessity, which no man has solved or is at all likely to solve. We see an earthly father moving with free and kindly step within and beneath the laws which he has prescribed for himself, stopping to comfort this child and to correct that, stepping aside to lift up the fallen or bring back the erring ; and we best conceive of God when we think of Him as our Father in heaven, observant of law and rule indeed, yet not bound by them, able so to administer them as to secure the general good, able also so to vary their operation or so to transcend it as that He may carry comfort, pardon, and the gifts of his bounty to every seeking and prepared heart.

It is on this conception of Him that our Saviour insists, and especially insists when He teaches and encourages us to pray. To meet the doubts and fears of the weak or the sceptical, or to rebuke the insolence of the scornful, it may be necessary at times to shew that Science has nothing to allege against the efficacy of Prayer; that by his influence on our own wills or the wills of our neighbours, by his perfect administration of perfect laws, or by miracles which transcend the laws they illustrate and emphasize, God may grant us our requests. But, after all, if we believe in God, our best wisdom will be to speak to Him for ourselves; to speak to Him as to our Father in heaven, assured that He will listen to us, and that, by giving or by withholding what we ask, He will correct and renew our wills, and purge them of all that now makes it hard to say, "Thy will, not ours, be done." Only, let us ever remember that, when we pray aright, we do not attempt to dictate, to prescribe, to change the perfect Divine Will, and, still less, to whine and wheedle till we get our own way: we rather endeavour to lift our imperfect wills into harmony with God's perfect Will, whether it say "Aye" or "No" to our passing desires, whether it be revealed in miracle or in law.

III. THE REIGN OF LAW AN INCENTIVE TO PRAYER.

We have seen that "the reign of law" by no means renders prayer unreasonable; that in many ways, and without any violation of law, God may answer our petitions. We must now attempt a bolder flight, and try to shew that this very reign of law, so far from being, as we are told, a conclusive reason *against* prayer, is, in fact, a sufficient reason *for* it, a common and keen incentive to the habit of hopeful supplication.

No man who is at once thoughtful and devout can regret to see religious questions even of the gravest kind discussed by public men, in our public prints, provided always that the discussion is marked by sincerity and reverence, however much he may differ from the conclusions at which they arrive. Such discussions breed doubts, indeed ; but these very doubts both deepen and confirm our faith in the end, if at least we handle them wisely, and help us to correct what is erroneous and to enlarge what is narrow in our conceptions of religious truth, or in our modes of stating them.

This very discussion on the reasonableness and efficacy of prayer, for example, which has now been carried on for some years, and seems, for a while at least, to have drawn to a close, has been already of the greatest service to the Church. It has done much to banish from the popular mind the notion that, by due importunity, we may weary or constrain God into granting us whatever, or almost whatever, we ask of Him. True, this notion was always opposed to all that thoughtful men have acknowledged to be the true function of prayer, and even to what the unthoughtful have always *professed* to believe about it. For surely no man, who had in any measure possessed himself of the spirit of Christ, has ever failed to add to his most importunate petitions the saving clause, "if it be the will of God." At the same time it must be confessed that thousands of good men and women used to think it possible that almost anything might come to be the will of God, if only they asked for it often enough and urgently enough. *This* notion has, I say, been well-nigh banished from the mind of the Church by the recent discussion. More and more we are all coming to feel that the very best thing we can desire is that God's will for us should be done rather than our own, and that a chief function of prayer is to lift these weak erring wills of ours

into a free and happy consent with his wise and holy Will. In short, that clause, "if it be thy will," is becoming an essential and pervading element of our prayers, and no longer, as too often it used to be, a mere perfunctory courtesy appended to our prayers, of which we secretly hoped that God would take no notice.

To have our profession thus turned into a reality, to be made *sincere* in our intercourse with Heaven, is a very great gain: and for this gain we are mainly indebted to the sceptics who opened the discussion with a challenge on the efficacy of prayer.

But, surely, this gain would be attended by a loss to match were we to conclude that, because it is a chief function of prayer to draw our wills into harmony with God's will, therefore this is its *only* function; surely our loss would be even greater than our gain were we to conclude that the Divine Will can have no expression save in and through the laws by which the physical phenomena of the universe are shaped, and that therefore the will of God can in no way be affected by our petitions. Yet this is a loss to which we are assured we must submit by one of the philosophies of the day. The alternative it places before us is simply this: Either give up all claim to the exercise of reason, and believe that the universe is ruled by an infinite Caprice, capable of being bent in a thousand different ways by the flatteries and importunities of prayer; or, using discourse of reason, concede that your whole life is ruled by laws which cannot be broken, to the uniform action of which no exceptions can be allowed, and cease to importune God for violations of these laws. But is it, can it, be true that no single point of rest for our reason and heart can be found in the wide interval which separates Law from Caprice? Are *men* never actuated by aught but these two motives—a rigorous and uniform observance of law, and a blind submission to

irrational caprice? From the tone taken by the fashionable and confident philosophy of the hour one would infer that, in the whole circle of human and divine motives, there were only these two points! That I may not be suspected of misrepresenting the argument of this school of thought—for the sake of brevity and clearness, and to avoid odious and disparaging nicknames, we may call it the *Uniformitarian* School, since it lays so much stress on the uniform action of the laws under which we live—let me quote a few words from a well-known disciple of it.* “*That doctrine,*” he says, “is destitute of reasonable foundation ” which affirms it to be either possible or desirable “to persuade God to arrest or modify what are called the great natural laws, or to act upon his will so as to alter his intentions in regard either of men or things, souls or bodies.” According to him, prayer intended to affect the course of God’s actions, either as to our physical or our moral and spiritual life, assumes a caprice at the centre of things which would be quite intolerable to us if we could in any way conceive it in the region of our every-day experience. “No greater misfortune,” he maintains, “could befall the human race than that some day it should discover with positive assurance that the successions of phenomena were rendered uncertain by an Unseen Will. Once ascertain that these perturbations by prayer existed to an appreciable extent, and such a discovery would not only unhinge the industry of the world, would not only make calculation useless and science foolish, but in its moral effect it would bury all activity of thought in the gloom of an abject religion; it would discourage what there is of most manly and generous in the human race; it would change us from a nation of workers into a congregation of monks; and it would involve heaven and

* The citation is from a letter published some two years ago by the Hon. Auberon Herbert, a letter quoted and discussed in *The Spectator*.

earth in a common corruption of flattery on the one side and favour on the other. The degradation of such a system can be felt at once by asking ourselves the question under which *régime* we would elect to live—that of fixed laws, in absolute dependence on which all might regulate their energies and efforts, or a *régime* of asking and receiving, the quantity of the one being regulated by the quantity of the other.”

This is a heavy indictment to bring against Prayer and those who believe in it; yet it is only a fair and honest exposition of the view taken by the Uniformitarians. They assume as axioms which need no proof, (1) that the only alternative open to us is that we must live either under the rule of uniform and invariable Laws, or under the rule of a blind and unintelligible Caprice; and (2) that, if we are ruled by Law, and not by Caprice, prayer is utterly irrational and absurd, since the law must take its course, despite our supplications. How are we to meet these assumptions? Let us be bold, and meet them right in the teeth. Let us, not assume, but affirm and try to prove, (1) that the uniform operation of Law, so far from rendering prayer unreasonable and absurd, is the very ground on which we do and ought to pray; and (2) that, as there is much in human motive and action which is neither a mere observance of Law nor an indulgence of Caprice, so we may well believe, since we are in the image of God, that there is much in Him which cannot be classed under either of these terms.

1. Consider for a moment what is the effect really produced on us by the uniform action of Law in the natural world. We know that the seasons—summer and winter, seed time and harvest—though they may vary within certain limits, will not altogether fail us. Knowing this, we expect them to return upon us in their familiar sequence; we pre-

pare for them, avail ourselves of them, and compel each in turn to minister to our use and welfare. The farmer can sow his seed in winter precisely because he believes that, in the uniform course of Nature, spring will come with its softening rains, summer with its ripening heat, and autumn with its golden sheaves. If there were no uniformity in Nature, if he could not reckon on an unchangeable order and sequence, he would hardly venture to risk his seed-corn in the earth, since he could not be sure that he would receive any return for his expenditure of grain and toil. So that, as indeed Coleridge long since pointed out, the effect of the uniformity of Nature is this; it excites expectation; it inspires a sense of security; it quickens hope: that is to say, it causes the very emotions in us which find expression in Prayer—*hope, expectation, desire.*

But consider also that, while there is much in Nature which speaks of law and uniformity, there is much that suggests the action of a Free Will which is not in bondage to Law. As yet, at least, we cannot reduce *all* the natural facts and phenomena to laws that we can formulate, and on which we may act with certainty. Great as are the advances of science, no man can predict what the weather will be to-morrow, nor whether this year's harvest will be as abundant as the last. And the true test of science is prediction. We *can* predict that two and two will in all cases make four, unless indeed the laws of human thought should ever be radically altered, and that the angles of every triangle will always be equal to two right angles. But who can predict the changes in the atmosphere of the sun, or even in that of the earth? And wherever *life* enters into and complicates the phenomena which science sets itself to investigate and reduce to law, it is still at fault. Thus, for example, as Sir George Cornwall Lewis has observed, although men have

so profound an interest in all that relates to health, medical science is an important exception to the rule that "the physical are better ascertained than the moral sciences." So little faith indeed have the ablest physicians in their own art, that it is a question whether anything worthy of the name of medical *science* really exists. And in proportion as the form of life rises—from physical to intellectual, from intellectual to moral, from moral to spiritual life—the power and scope of science are still more limited and imperfect. Men of science, indeed, constantly assume that, since we are able to classify and arrange many of the facts of Nature under certain laws, so, as our knowledge grows from less to more, all the facts will fall either under the laws already formulated or under some still wider generalizations. And probably they are right, in so far as the *physical* universe is concerned. All that I now wish to point out is, that this assumption is only an assumption for the present, and that therefore they have no right to speak as if they carried the key of the whole universe in their private pocket. They are very ready to charge us with anthropomorphism, with making a god in our own likeness; but, if it were worth while, it would be easy to retort the charge, and to shew that, simply because *they* can see nothing but Law in the universe, they assume that God must be made after *their* image, and that He must be just as incapable of rising to any higher conception as they are themselves. If, indeed, men were crystals, or trees, or even stars; if, in short, they were merely material creatures without intelligence and will, it might be that the whole round of their motives and actions should be ruled by law. But as men have intelligence and will and affection; as God, if He be good, must desire to see them good; as they can only become good by the free action of their own will—compulsory goodness being no goodness—it may be that we should look to the

human world rather than to the natural world for hints as to the methods by which God rules and shapes our lives. And this human world, the world of thought, emotion, volition, is infinitely more complex and subtle than the physical world, and does not lend itself so easily to the rigid conceptions and stingy alternatives of the Uniformitarian school. Indeed, we see how ill it fares with them, when they attempt to deal, on their own principles merely, with even a single human soul. Critics of this school have taken Shakespeare in hand, for instance. They have assumed that *his* creations are all governed by laws which they have discovered and formulated; and that when you have ascertained the leading motive of any one of his works, or *worlds* as we might rather call them, and know how to apply their laws to it, you have the key to all that it contains. Each drama, according to them, has its ruling motive, and every action and incident in it—*i.e.*, all the inhabitants and events of this lesser world—contribute to work it out. And so they come, with their laws of Shakespeare, and apply them to this drama and to that, authoritatively pronounce that this passage is not from his hand nor that, that this part and that must have been interpolated by a foreign pen;—dealing with our great poet, in fact, very much as their kindred critics have dealt with the books of Scripture, contradicting one another at every step, and involving themselves in the most admired confusion. Meantime the empire of Shakespeare standeth sure; and what his critics most clearly prove, is that they and their laws are far too petty to comprehend him.

But if one man is not to be thus brought under laws that we can trace and tabulate, how is the whole world of men? That the Uniformitarians have failed, utterly and completely failed, in dealing with this larger world, only grows the more apparent the longer we consider them and their works.

They have assumed, as I have said, that the reign of law is fatal to prayer, and that we must choose between Law and Caprice, no other alternative being open to us. But if it be impossible for God to answer prayer, must it not be equally impossible for man to answer it, since man is at least more clearly the subject of Law than He who made and rules the universe? And yet is it impossible for man?

Consider our human relations; reflect on what we know of human action and motive: and then say whether these assumptions can be sustained. Does uniformity of action drive us from prayer? Is it not, rather, an indispensable condition of prayer and a direct encouragement to it? In the administration of public justice, for example, what is it that makes every man bold to bring his suit into court, and to seek redress for any wrong that has been done him? It is simply that he believes the administration of justice to be tolerably uniform, inflexible, invariable. If the judges were notoriously open to bribes, if they were at the beck of the sovereign, if they courted the favour of the mob, we should no longer be able to calculate on them; we should be afraid to carry to them our prayers for redress. It is the very uniformity and steadfastness of the administration of justice which impresses and invites us to appeal to it. So far from hindering us, it is this very superiority to change and caprice which begets confidence and moves us to carry our suits before the public magistrate. If our judges were Turks, instead of Englishmen, could we possibly appeal to them with the same confidence? And yet in the face of all this our Uniformitarian friends assume, without any attempt at proof, that if we confess that God rules the world by laws which are uniform in their action and regular and invariable, we must also confess that it is unreasonable to pray to Him, that we can only take our suits to Him so long as we con-

ceive of Him as actuated by Caprice, and capable of being moved to favouritism by bribes, by flatteries, by importunities and tears ! In short, they quietly assume that in our intercourse with God we shall be actuated by motives the very opposite of those which govern us in our dealings with men !

2. But if uniformity, instead of being fatal to it, is the very life of prayer, is their second assumption any truer than the first ? They assume, as we have seen, that the world *must* be ruled either by Law or by Caprice, that no other alternative is open to us. But is that true ? A judge, who would be equitable, cannot always observe the strict letter of the law. Human actions and motives are too subtle and complex to be brought fairly under the operation of inelastic inflexible rules. But when a judge departs from the mere letter, or the exact requirements, of the law, is he necessarily moved to it by mere caprice ? On the contrary he may be, and commonly is, moved by equity, by the desire to do a higher justice than he could do were he to abide by the mere letter of the law. A man *can* answer prayer, then, simply by a wise and just administration of law ; and yet we are required to believe that God *cannot* ! A man is *not* shut up to the choice between Law and Caprice ; and yet we are required to believe that God *is* ! A man, so far from indulging an unreasonable caprice, may be moved by equity, by an honourable desire that the real ends of law should be reached, to break through the restraints of law ; and yet, without an atom of proof, we are required to believe that God can only be moved by caprice should He act in any but a strictly legal way ! Is, then, equity impossible to God, or love ?

Take another illustration. A master who employs a great number of workmen, if he be wise and kind, will have certain definite modes or rules of action, rules which he

will expect all in his employ to observe, and which he himself will be forward both to observe and to maintain. No large business, indeed, can be carried on successfully except by regular and uniform methods of procedure. But does this uniformity of action and rule prove fatal to any reasonable request? On the contrary, the men who serve such a master as this soon "know where to have him;" *i.e.*, they learn what they may ask of him with a good hope of having their request granted, and what it will be utterly in vain for them to ask. If he were the mere fool of caprice and passion, they could have no such reasonable and assured expectation. They would hardly care to prefer any request, however reasonable it might be, simply because, as he did not act on reason and principle, they could never be sure that it would not be met with an irrational and arbitrary refusal. So that here, again, uniformity is the very life of prayer, the very ground of that confident "anticipation which is both wind and sails to the movements of the mind."* Why, then, should *God's* adherence to rule, to principle, to law, prove fatal to our prayers, to any reasonable request which we may carry to his feet?

If, moreover, the master, the head of a great establishment, be sincerely bent on promoting the welfare of those

* The phrase is from Edward Irving, who, like myself, uses the idea of Coleridge, and, alas,—for I hold Irving to have been the greatest religious 'orator of modern times, with most of prophetic insight and spirit and style—*spoils* it, by substituting "the constancy of God's promises" for "the uniformity of Nature's operation," as "giving aim and calculation and certainty to events" in the domain of the intellect and will and spirit. Despite this substitution of the promises for the character of God—as if He were bound only by his word—no man can read Irving's magnificent discourses on Prayer, in vol. iii. of his "Collected Writings," without learning much from them, and being afresh impressed with the wonderful powers of his eloquence. His speech is like "the large utterance" of the gods.

whom he employs, will he not willingly modify the operations of his rules in order to meet their varying wants and conditions? Will he not at times go beyond the scope of his own rules in order to shew a considerate kindness to those who serve him, and who need that this or that rule should be relaxed? Is the only alternative with *him*, Law or Caprice? If, for the good of any of those who depend upon him, he does relax or modify the operation of rule, are we to charge him with a capricious lawlessness fatal to the welfare of the rest? May not his motive be a virtuous one? May it not be a sincere regard for the welfare of his servants? Why, then, are we to assume that God has no alternative but the observance of rule or the indulgence of caprice? May not He also shew a kindness above and beyond that of law?

Take a final illustration from family life. A wise and good father, that he may have an orderly and happy household, frames methods of household action and order by which for the most part he steadfastly abides. But does his regular observance of rule, his demand that his children should also observe it, hinder them from ever coming to him with a request, or prevent him from ever granting it? On the contrary it begets in them a confident expectation that he will listen to their reasonable requests. They feel the wisdom and goodness of his laws; but they also feel that, because he is wise and good, he will modify, or transcend, his laws in order to meet any emergency that may arise, to supply their wants, to promote their welfare. It is only in those ill-guided and unhappy households in which the parents are actuated, not by rule and principle, but by passion and impulse, that the children feel it is no use to ask anything, however reasonable, and form the habit of acting for themselves. So that here, again, the regular operation of law, so far from proving fatal to prayer, guides

and inspires it. The children know what to ask for; and if, in answer to their requests, the father modifies or transcends the household rules, they do not dream of charging him with caprice; they recognize the love which prompts him now to abide by his rules and now to suspend or to depart from them on touch of need.

And what I want to know, what I think the Uniformitarians are bound to tell us, is: Why, if in all provinces of human action, uniformity, what we call an invariable adherence to law, begets that confident expectation and hope which find expression in prayer, *God's* uniform administration of law should push us from his feet, and close the lips which we had opened in supplication before Him? To me it seems that his steadfast adherence to law should rather be the very ground and life and inspiration of prayer. Because He is not changeable, we should know, if in such a connection I may use the colloquialism, "where to have Him;" we should know what to ask that He will be sure to grant, and what it will be wholly in vain for us to ask. Because He is of an inflexible justice, we should confidently bring our suits to Him, assured that He will do us right. Because He is a wise and considerate Master and a most righteous tender Father, we should lay our needs and wishes before Him, with a sure and certain hope, that, through the operation of law or by transcending law, by granting or by refusing our requests, He will give us all that we really need.

And, finally, I think we have a right to ask this question: If in all departments of human life we find that men can depart from the strict observance of law without sinking into caprice, nay, may thus rise to an exhibition of equity, of kindness, of love; why are we to concede the assumption that God's sole alternative is Law or Caprice? On what ground are we asked to admit that *He* can never suspend,

or modify, or transcend the operation of his laws except at the prompting of a blind and unreasonable impulse? Surely equity, kindness, love, are not impossible to Him. And if they are not, we *must* traverse the fundamental assumption of the Uniformitarian School; we must affirm that God is neither the slave of his laws nor the sport of an arbitrary caprice; but a Judge who loves righteousness, a Master who rules by serving, and a Father who loves us with a pure and all-transcending affection.

IV. THE LIMITS OF PRAYER.

The leading modern objection to Prayer is based, as we have seen, on two assumptions, neither of which has been nor can be proved. The first assumption is that our lives must be ruled by laws which are invariable in their action and to which no exceptions can be allowed, or by a blind unintelligent caprice on the action of which no man can securely calculate; that, in fact, we are shut up to this sole alternative, Law or Caprice. The answer to this assumption we found to be that, as there is much in *human* action and motive which is neither a mere observance of law nor a mere indulgence of caprice, so we may well believe that there is much in God which cannot be classed under either of these terms. A judge departs at times from the letter, and even from the clear intention of the law, not that he may follow the impulses of caprice, but that he may render a more exact justice. At times, when there is occasion and need, a master deviates from the rules he has laid down for the conduct of his business; but he may deviate from them only to shew a more considerate kindness for those whom he employs, or even to secure the very ends for which the rules were made. At times, too, a father goes beyond the lines of the domestic order to which he commonly adheres, not from caprice, but simply that his love for his

children may have free scope. Why, then, unless equity, kindness, love, be impossible to God, are we to conclude that the heavenly Father, Master, Judge, must be actuated by an irrational caprice if He should at any time, and whatever the need, transcend the laws by which He commonly abides?

The second assumption is, that if the world be ruled by law, and not by caprice, then there is no room for prayer; the law must take its course despite our supplications. And the answer to this assumption we found to be that the uniform operation of law, so far from proving the vanity of prayer, is the very ground on which we do and ought to pray. It is the very constancy and uniformity of the administration of justice, for example, which induces us to take our suits for redress before the judges. It is the very observance of law, order, rule, method, on the part of a master or a father, which encourages his children or workmen to make their requests known to him, and teaches them what sort of requests he will be likely to grant and what to refuse. In all our social relations, indeed, it is the men who walk by principle, the men who are wise, just, orderly, honourable, to whom we look for help and carry our prayers; while, on the other hand, it is the men who are capricious, uncertain, moved by every wind that blows, whom we cannot trust, and of whom we dislike to ask help, because we never know but that they will refuse it harshly and unreasonably. So far from being a fatal impediment to prayer, therefore, uniformity of action, adherence to law, is an incentive to prayer—at least to the prayer which is reasonable and wise.

But prayer, if it is to be answered, if even we are to desire that it should be answered, *must* be reasonable and wise; that is, it must accord with the will—with the equity, the kindness, the love—of God. The settled purpose of a

good judge is to administer justice, to see that right is done ; and if the suit we bring before him accord with that purpose, we may be sure that he will decide it in our favour, either by some equitable application of the law or by equitably transcending the law. The constant purpose of a good father is to promote the welfare of his children ; and if our request accord with that purpose, we may be sure that he will grant it, either by adhering to the household rules or by so modifying and relaxing them as to meet our need : but if we are simply seeking a gratification or an indulgence, which will be inimical whether to our own or to the general welfare, we may be very sure that he will not grant our request, and ought to be very thankful that he will not. In short, that uniformity of action, that very constancy of purpose, which is the life of true or reasonable prayer, is the death of selfish and unreasonable prayer.

So that after all the great question we have to ask and to answer, if we would pray aright, is : “What is the will, what the purpose, of God? What is He aiming at for us, and for the universe at large? What is the end which He has set before Him, and which He will very certainly reach, whether by adhering to law or by transcending it?”

And the Christian answer to this great question is most gracious and reassuring. The Everlasting Word, by whom all things were made and by whom all things subsist, came forth from the bosom of the Father to incarnate and teach the will of God ; to shew us what it is like ; to persuade and convince us that it is as good, as righteous and kind, as He affirmed it to be. According to Him, the will of God is our salvation—not simply nor mainly our deliverance from present or even from future punishment, but our deliverance from the evil from which all our miseries spring ; a redemption which begins to take effect upon us the very moment we accept Christ’s revelation of the good will of

God, and which grows ever more perfect as we more fully commit ourselves to that Divine disclosure. According to Him, the infinite and eternal will of God is set on our welfare, is ever seeking it, and is satisfied only as that welfare is secured. According to Him, God is love, and love inspired by an infallible wisdom, and love using all the resources of omnipotence for our good. So that, if we may trust Christ, *the unchangeableness of God is an unchangeable Charity*; and the invariable purpose and law of his action is a loving intention and endeavour to redeem us from all the miseries of evil into all the blessedness of a sovereign and perfect goodness.

Now, as we have seen, all constancy of purpose, all uniformity of law and action, warrants expectation and hope, if only we are in harmony with it. The farmer reckons on his harvest precisely because the laws of Nature are uniform, and he is working with them, not against them. The suitor looks confidently for a favourable verdict only when the administration of justice is uniform, not capricious, and he is persuaded that his claim is just. The child calculates on receiving what he asks only when the father is ruled by reason and kindness, and he knows that his request is a reasonable one, and falls in with his father's purposes and methods and aims. But *God's aim*, God's *will*, is our welfare, our true and highest welfare; and hence we may be sure that *the limits of our welfare are the only limits of his will concerning us*; the only limits, therefore, within which our prayers must be confined. And who wants to go beyond *those* limits? Who really desires God to give him what it would injure him to have? Whatever consists with the ends of love, we may ask with confidence, for God is love: and who would ask what Love must deny? Assuredly not the man who prays; for he of all men longs for welfare—his own welfare and that of the world—and

desires in all things to submit his will to the larger wiser will of God.

But here it may naturally be asked : If God's will be our welfare, must not his will take effect upon us whether we do or do not pray that it may take effect? Must we *ask* Him to do his will before He will do it? And if we must, *why* must we?

The reason is plain. If we were machines, lay figures, automata, as we could not pray, so also there would be no need that we should pray : all that was requisite for us and all the good ends of which we were capable might be secured by the administration of forces and laws we could not resist. But we are *men*, men with wills of our own, wills which are our own that we may make them God's. True, He is ever seeking our welfare ; but even our welfare, since it depends on our voluntary and steadfast pursuit of righteousness, cannot be secured apart from ourselves, apart from our own actions and determinations. Our welfare depends on the character we form ; and character must be freely formed : the nobler and more complete the character, the larger must be the scope of its freedom. In moral and theological discussions we too often speak of ourselves as if no free and reasonable spirit had been breathed into us ; but the moment we reflect we see that as God has chosen to surround Himself with children possessed of intelligence, will, affection, even He cannot *make* us good, and so secure our welfare, by mere mechanical pressure, or even by a moral pressure which should force our wills. Were He to compel us to goodness, the goodness, such as it was, would be his, not ours. If we, we ourselves, are to be good, it can only be as we voluntarily make his will our will, and his aim for us our aim for ourselves. You can't make a child wise by performing a surgical operation on him and inserting a book into his brain ; nor can you make him good by

compelling him to do what you hold to be right. You try to make him wise by teaching him, by inducing him to learn, what you know; you try to make him good, *i.e.*, to train him for a free and manly goodness, by bringing good influences persuasively to bear on him, by trusting him, by throwing him gradually on his own resources, by your grief and displeasure when he does ill, by your approval and joy when he does well. And thus God acts, and must act, with us now that He has made us what we are. If He were to lay his finger on our wills, and to compel us to do right, *that* would not be to make us good, nor would it be, in the highest sense, to shew Himself good. He can only make us good by winning us of our own will to do that which is right, to form the character which He approves, and to work together with Him for our own welfare and blessedness. And, therefore, He shews us what his will is, shews how He loves us, shews us that, in his unchangeable love, He is ever seeking our welfare, and invites and persuades us to join with Him in seeking it. He unveils the beauties of holiness to us, and the miseries and degradations of sin; and when we endeavour to cease from doing evil and to follow after goodness, He offers us his help; He bids us tell Him freely of our failures and lapses and of the difficulties we encounter in our endeavours after righteousness, and assures us that, if we seek them, we shall receive the succours of his grace.

Now when, through the life and teaching of Christ, we know the will of God to be our welfare and the welfare of all men; when we are assured that He is ever seeking to secure it, that nothing can divert Him from this gracious aim and endeavour: what is the natural effect of this conviction on our minds? The natural and reasonable effect of it is to persuade us that whatever we ask which will contribute either to our own good or that of the world, He

will grant. We feel that we may ask Him to do us good or do our neighbours good with as confident an expectation, as reasonable a hope, as that with which the farmer, relying on the constancy of Nature, sows his seed ; or that of a suitor who, relying on the equal administration of law, takes a just claim into a court of justice ; or that of a child who, relying on the constancy of paternal love, makes a request which he knows to be in accordance with his father's purpose concerning him. We know that what we ask accords with the will of God, and therefore we are sure that He will listen to our prayer.

But we could not be sure if we did not pray ; for God's will is our welfare : and whether or not this or that gift will contribute to our welfare may wholly depend on whether we do or do not pray for it. Prayer is not the mere utterance of any form of words, however "noble and incomparable ;" it is the kindled emotions and desires of the soul reaching out after its own true welfare or the welfare of others : that is to say, it is the longing and aspiration of the soul after that which God is ever seeking to secure for it. And when this longing is once kindled, or kindled to new activity, much may be given to us which must otherwise have been withheld.

A sick man, for example, pining under the wasting pressure of disease, asks that he may be recovered to health. But if he desire health only that he may go on living to himself, for his own selfish or base ends, it may be more for his ultimate and enduring welfare, or more for the welfare of the world around him, that his request should be denied. His prayer is not true prayer at all ; for all true prayer is based on a desire that the good will of God may be done : and therefore he may ask in vain. But, on the other hand, if his thoughts upon his bed have convinced him of the folly and baseness of his previous

course of life, and he desires health mainly that he may devote himself to the pursuit of righteousness and lead a new and higher life, then it may be for his welfare, or for the welfare of the world around him, that health should be restored to him. His prayer is now true prayer; for now it has respect to the will of God which is ever bent on the moral culture and welfare of men: and therefore it may be well that his petition should be granted.

So, again, with that "prayer for fair weather" which has, naturally enough, since it has often been terribly abused, excited no little ridicule and contempt. If, at the prompting of public authority, a nation merely recites an appointed form of words in which fair weather is asked for, without rousing itself to any moral emotion or intention, it might as well mutter a charm or an incantation. Up to this point there has been no pretence of prayer even; for prayer is the utterance of religious emotion, and as yet no religious emotion has been generated. And there may be much more than this before true prayer is reached. A nation may be moved to genuine emotion and desire; a long succession of adverse years may have brought it to the verge of famine and bankruptcy: the whole nation may long with one heart for relief, and, despairing of earthly succour, may cry to Heaven with one voice for help. But if their prayer have no respect to the will of God, to his purpose and intention for them and for all men; if they are not resolving that, should bounteous harvests and prosperous days return, they will use God's gifts in his service, *i.e.*, for good and noble ends; if they are only longing for relief, for the power to gratify their selfish appetencies and baser desires, their prayer, however sincere, is not true prayer: it may be for their welfare that God should refuse it, that He should compel them, by the pressure of a growing misery, to reflect on the true ends and aims of human life. But if, under this

pressure, a nation should lie all broken down under a sense of its sins ; if it should ask succour of God with an earnest and settled intention of rising to a higher form of life, should life be spared, and of using for worthy ends whatever gifts it may please Him to bestow—then surely their prayer has become a true prayer, and it may be both for their good and for the good of the world at large that it should be answered.* The fair weather, the abundant harvest, the bright prosperous days may be good for them now, though before they would not have been good.

So that the spiritual emotions and intentions which find expression in all true prayer may, even in the eye of reason, affect the action of God and the course of events ; they may fit us to receive, and therefore they may enable Him to bestow, gifts which apart from these emotions and intentions, would not subserve the welfare of the world. Our main care, therefore, when we take our requests before God should be, to assure ourselves that the ends we have in view are in accordance with his Will. We should redouble our care when we ask for temporal gifts—for health, wealth, success, prosperity and the like—since in seeking *these* gifts we run a greater hazard of seeking them for selfish or unworthy ends, than when we crave moral or spiritual gifts. God's will is our welfare in subordination to, and as part of, the welfare of the entire race. And as we are very apt to crave temporal gifts, to desire exemption from poverty, pain, detection, ignominy, without much thought as to whether or not these gifts will, we being what we are at the time, promote our real and lasting welfare, we ought to be the more careful, we ought to examine our motives with the more searching inquest, when we bring to God such requests as these. Only as our motives are pure, only as we have respect to the true ends of life, only as we ask what will

* See 2 Chron. vi. 26, 27.

really contribute to that welfare which is the will and aim of God, can we reasonably hope, or even reasonably desire, that He will give us that which we ask of Him.

“Still,” it may be objected, “if we grant all this, if we grant that God may reasonably answer prayers the answers to which will promote the well-being of men ; if, moreover, we grant that it might be well were God to answer such prayers even when to answer them He must vary, or modify, or transcend the operation of natural laws, have we any reason to think that He does thus vary, or modify, or transcend them? Have we not, rather, many and conclusive reasons to believe that He invariably abides by them? The analogies you have taken from human life break down when we apply them to God. A judge, a master, a father may rightly deviate from domestic or business or legal rules ; for no rules devised by human wit can be perfect, and perfectly applicable to all cases and occasions. But God is of an absolute wisdom. May not his laws, then, be so perfect that no deviation from them can ever become necessary, so comprehensive and flexible that they fit themselves smoothly and infallibly to every contingency? And in point of fact do we not find that He never does depart from them?”

The answer to this grave and difficult objection, briefly put, I take to be as follows. Those who look to the material universe alone for hints on the character and rule of God sometimes forget what at other times they proudly assert, that man is the crown of created things, the paragon of the world. They forget that as the highest thing they know is life, so the highest and noblest forms of life are found in the reason, will, conscience, and affections of man. They forget that we must therefore see more of God in life, and above all in the highest forms of human life, than in whatever else the universe contains. *We* must not for-

get, we must constantly remember that, since we are more likely to find some faint resemblance of the Most High in the highest things we know, we must look to man, and above all to that which is highest and noblest in man, that is, his spiritual faculties and affections, for the most accurate indications of the character and ways of God. But if, as we are bound, we go to Man rather than to Nature for our conception of God, and to determine whether or not He is likely to answer prayer—do we find that in proportion as men grow good and wise it becomes vain for us to carry to them any, even the most reasonable, requests? On the contrary, as our whole argument implies, it is precisely the wise and good to whom we take our reasonable requests with the most confident expectation and hope. Do we even find as men grow good and wise that they are more and more bound by law, that they adhere more and more strictly to any set of rules or to any prescribed methods of action? Rather we find (1) that the wiser and abler and better they are, the more can they so obey all laws as to produce greater results from and through them than when they stood on a lower stage of culture; and (2) that they can the more easily, if there be need, graciously dispense with and transcend all laws, in order to reach a higher end than a mere observance of law and rule would enable them to reach. Think, for example, how the great and practised artist both obeys the rules of his art until he masters them and they are no longer bonds or restraints to him, but feet and hands and wings; and how he also rises above them, so that in his finest work there is always much which cannot be brought under any law, or at least any known law. Think with what effect a great poet, a Shakespeare, observes all the ascertained laws of dramatic art, and with what still greater effect he transcends them, so that we have to make new laws for him, and even then find

that that which is most divine in his work is irreducible to law and rule. Think what noble and gracious courtesy a gentleman may shew while observing all the rules of social intercourse ; and yet how many a plain man, without observing those rules, with nothing but a gentle and a Christian heart to guide him, may shew a still finer and more generous courtesy than he. Think how all the great examples of moral excellence, even up to Christ Himself, have shewn a righteousness beyond that of law—this supra-legal righteousness being their sovereign charm and power. Genius, indeed, whether it be mental or moral genius, is always law-less ; *i.e.*, there is always much in it that cannot be brought under rule ; and that in it which cannot be brought under rule and law is precisely that in it which all the world admires as most rare, most exquisite, most excellent. If, then, we are to frame our conception of God, not on the hints supplied by the material universe alone, but rather on the nature of Man, who is the crowning glory of the universe, and whom the Scriptures declare to be the very “image of God,” and on that which is highest and rarest and best in him, we shall at least hesitate before admitting that there is nothing in God which may not be reduced under terms of laws.

And when we more attentively consider the material world itself, and how and to what extent the operation of natural laws is modified by human intelligence and will, we shall even deny that there is nothing in it except the laws and forces which Science has discovered and tabulated. It is not easy so much as to imagine what a vastly different world this planet would have been had man never been born into it, or to what an enormous extent he has reshaped it by modifying and controlling the action of the laws of Nature upon it. But those who hold that there is no room for the play of Intelligence and Free-will among the laws by which

the universe is governed, will do well to consider what changes Man has wrought upon the face of Nature. Who has not seen these changes taking place in the immediate vicinity of his own residence within the last twenty or thirty years? Who does not find that practically the little world in which he dwells has become a changed world? And how shall we calculate the immense changes wrought upon the surface of the globe through the historic ages by the art and industry of man? By making roads, felling forests, draining the fields, embanking streams and flinging bridges over them; by building cities, digging harbours and piling up sea walls, and by a thousand similar processes he has, as it were, remade the earth and even reached up a hand to the clouds of heaven and driven the rainfall from land to land. And if the will of Man finds such free and ample scope among the laws and forces of Nature, so that, in a myriad ways, he can bend them to his purpose, must not the Will of God find room and verge enough to play freely among them, and to bend them to his purposes with a subtlety and potency infinitely beyond the reach of man?

Nor is it only by these large and intentional processes that men affect and control the course of Nature. The most trivial and careless action of even the least capable and influential of men may have consequences which Science itself can hardly calculate. Some of the consequences of such an action were traced in the "Quarterly Journal of Science" for January, 1875. In effect the illustration ran thus: Here is a gardener who may dig twenty more spadefuls before dinner, or only nineteen. That surely is a point which he is free to determine, a point which is determined for him by no physical force or law. But how much may depend on even this trivial determination of his will. On whether or not he digs that twentieth spadeful it may depend whether a slug is turned up or not; on the slug may depend

the dinner of a young swallow who is feeble on the wing ; on this single meal may depend whether the bird shall join the migratory flock and reach Africa in safety : but on this fledgeling's arrival or non-arrival may depend whether a certain insect shall be snapped up by him, or left to lay a million eggs, which, in that case, will next month be each a locust laying a million more ; and on this billion of locusts and their progeny it may depend whether by Christmas a vast tract of country shall be green as Eden or a leafless wilderness, and its mean temperature 100° or only 70° ; and on whether such an area be the hottest or coolest portion of the tropics may well depend the winds, and the drought or rain of a season over half, or the whole, of Europe. All these events, and many more, may depend on the single, unstudied, momentary act of a man who is quite free to do that act or to leave it undone ! And when we reflect how many such acts must be done every day, and how wide and momentous and complex their consequences are, we cannot but admit that the will of man counts for much even in the physical universe. Why, then, should the will of God count for nothing ? If the laws of the physical universe leave room and scope for the free play of our wills, if the results they produce are so largely and constantly modified by human action, who will contend that they leave no room for the volition of God, and that He can only act as they prompt or permit Him to act ? If by accident, and by design, men can change the natural order of events, and turn it into currents in which it would not otherwise have run, we may be very sure that God can so vary and modify it as to promote our welfare and to grant us whatever it may be for our good to receive. Just as Carlyle * declares it to be flatly inconceivable that intellect, conscience, will, affection, could have been put into man

* "History of Frederick the Great," bk. xxi., ch. 9.

“by an Entity that had none of its own;” so we may affirm it to be flatly inconceivable that God should have given men so great a power over the laws and forces of the material world and yet be incapable of exerting any such power Himself.

III.

Heaven.

I. THE RECOMPENSES OF THE WORLD TO COME.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 10.

WHEREVER men have believed in a life to come, they have shewn a constant and incorrigible tendency to peer into the future and to forecast the forms which that life would assume. As the tendency is a natural one, it is not to be sweepingly condemned. Our life on earth is so brief, so unsatisfactory at the best, yet so momentous if we are to live for ever, and moreover, it is and must be so largely shaped by our conception of the future state, that it is as reasonable as it is natural that we should endeavour by all possible means to learn what that life is like on which we enter when we die. Some voices indeed, voices of grave authority among them, pronounce the endeavour to be vain, hopeless, and even wrong. But he should be more than man who presumes to censure all generations of men. And how can that be wrong which is as inevitable as it is universal? Nay, how can that be wrong of which we find so many examples in Holy Writ? We may be sure that the endeavour to picture to ourselves the life beyond the grave is not wrong if only we rightly set about it. We may, on the contrary, be quite sure that *any* endeavour to conceive the future life, if only it be thoughtfully and reverently con-

ducted, will put new meaning and worth into the life we now live in the flesh.

But if we would at all rightly or helpfully conceive the future state, we must be on our guard against two common errors. First, we are apt, on I know not what authority, to suppose that death makes a sudden break in the continuity of our life, and effects a vast, radical, but most unaccountable, change in our character. And, secondly, in our attempts to conceive the future, we are too apt to busy our thoughts with the physical, rather than with the moral, conditions of the life to be. If we are on our guard against these errors, we shall not go far wrong in our endeavour to conceive what the coming life will be like ; or, if we err, our errors will do us but little harm.

The Scripture which most frequently gives shape to our conceptions of the future, and by which, for want of better knowledge, we have been led to dwell more than we should on its physical conditions, is the Book of the Revelation. St. John portrays the future state under the form of a "great city descending out of heaven," with its wall of jasper "great and high," its lofty gates of pearl, its streets of gold, its palaces shining, in a light above that of the sun, "like unto transparent glass;" while "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," flows through the midst of the streets, trees of life growing on either side of the river. Such a conception as this may seem to be very unlike aught that we now see around us ; and we may therefore have taken it as picturing forth that great and sudden change in the conditions of human life which has just been pronounced erroneous and misleading. But let us consider for a moment how natural and easy such a conception would be to St. John, however remote it may be from our own experience ; how entirely it would correspond to facts with which he was his whole life through familiar. For a thousand years before he wrote

and for more than a thousand years after he wrote, cities played a part in the history of every great nation which in many respects they no longer fill. During that long period the city, with its fortified walls and gates, was the one place in which men felt themselves secure amid well-nigh incessant storms of war and change. Men lived then rather for their city than themselves, and took a noble pride in lavishing their resources, not only on its stately public structures and works of art, but also in drawing to it whatever of human wisdom or skill would be likely to contribute whether to its power or to its attractiveness. Think what Babylon was, what Athens, what Rome, and above all what Jerusalem was, in ancient time, to their respective citizens; think also what Milan, Venice, Florence, Genoa were to their inhabitants in the Middle Ages; and you will easily perceive how naturally Heaven would shape itself as a city of transcendent beauty to the inhabitants of any of those great and superb cities, whether in the ancient or the modern world. You will also see how natural it would be for St. John to conceive of Heaven as a glorified Ephesus, or, more exactly still, as "a new Jerusalem," the city of the Great King. So that the very conception of the future life which to us may seem most remote from the conditions of our earthly life would really be in the very closest harmony with the conditions by which his life and thoughts were shaped. To him it would involve no great and sudden break in the continuity of human life that a man should pass from the city of Ephesus or Jerusalem to the still more superb City which he had seen in his visions,—a City in which the marble palaces of earth, and the cunningly-wrought gates of bronze, and the fountains and aqueducts, were replaced by mansions built of gems, and gates of pearl, and streets paved with gold, and a pure river of living waters.

But, as has already been said, there is a second point at

which we need to stand on our guard. It is very natural for us, when we lose those whom we love as we love our own souls, to follow them in thought and try to shape to ourselves the new happy conditions amid which they now live. At such times we cannot but ask ourselves such questions as these: Do the friends whom we have lost, and for whom our love grows keener now that we have lost them, still *live* in any true sense of the word; or do they lie wrapped in a calm and placid sleep, waiting for the resurrection of the body? Have they forgotten us now that they have left us, or do we still live in their memories and hearts? Will they, setting out on a new career of perfection so long before us, advance in it so rapidly as that when we die a hopeless and impassable interval will divide them from us; or will their growth, being mainly a growth in love, only endear us to them the more closely and prepare them more efficiently to help us? Do they know what we are doing and enduring now, with what pangs of blended love and grief we think of them, and how bitterly we mourn our offences against them? Have they any means of influencing us for our good, of helping and comforting us amid our toils and sorrows, as they must surely long to do if they have not altogether ceased to love us?

It is natural that we should ask such questions as these, questions prompted far more by affection than by a curious desire to pry within the veil. And yet no specific, no authoritative, answer can be given to them, no answer even that will satisfy our love, save that which we are able to infer from the unbounded goodness and kindness of God. If we *believe* in his love toward us and toward all men, we may be sure that our friends, though dead to us, live unto Him and are growing like Him. Since He does not forget us, we may be sure that they do not forget us. Since his greatness does not put Him beyond our reach,

we may be sure that no advance which they make toward Him will divide them from us. Since He spends his time in nothing else but in helping us and in seeking our welfare, we may be very sure that the more like Him they grow the more they will desire and be the better able to minister to our needs. If no more direct answer be given to the questions we commonly ask concerning our dead, that may be because God thought no such answer should be necessary to us; since his love, if only we believe in his love, is a sufficient answer to them all.

But, while on all these points we are left to faith and to the deductions which reason infers from the materials of our faith, there is one point on which the Voice of Inspiration speaks in no uncertain tone. Throughout the Scriptures, in the Old Testament and in the New, we everywhere find this law revealed: that in the future life every man will receive "according to his works," "according to his deeds," "after the work of his hands," "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or whether it be bad." In both Testaments this law is again and again illustrated by one and the same figure, viz., that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Whatever else, therefore, may be uncertain to us, we may be sure of this—that the future life will, in some sense, be a counterpart of the present life, since every man is then to receive according to his deeds, according to *all* his deeds, both good and bad.

Now as no man's life on earth is wholly good and no man's wholly bad; as, moreover, the man good on the whole is to receive according to his bad deeds as well as his good, and the man who is bad on the whole is to receive the due reward of his good deeds as well as of his bad deeds, it follows that the future life will be as complex, as varied, as chequered as is the present life: it follows that there will be no such sudden break in the continuity of human

life as we often assume, but that the next stage of it will be very much like, though we may also hope that it will be very much better and happier than, the stage through which we are passing now. If it be a law of the future life, and the law most clearly revealed in the Scriptures, that there every man will reap what he has sown and all that he has sown, it is a clear logical deduction from this law that the fruit we then eat will resemble the seed we are now sowing, the one great difference being that there will be more of it. Or, to put the same thought in other words, if it be the best known law of the future life that it will render to every man the due reward of his deeds, *all* his deeds both good and bad, then it is a clear logical deduction from this law that the future life will be a continuation of the present life, chequered with the same lights and shadows, though then the lights may grow brighter and the shadows fainter.

But, as if to put the deduction of reason beyond the reach of doubt, the Voice of Inspiration expressly declares the law of the future life to be also the law of the present life. It affirms that now, as then, every man reaps what he sows, and as he sows; that God now "renders to every man according to his works" (Prov. xxiv. 12), "according to his ways" (Job xxxiv. 11). In the Prophets and in the Psalms, no less than in the Law, there is the clear affirmation to which Jeremiah (chap. xvii. ver. 10; chap. xxxii. ver. 19) gives emphatic expression: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, *to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.*" And, on the whole, in the long run, as even Matthew Arnold maintains, human experience confirms the Divine revelation. Whether we regard our personal life, or the life of nations, if only we review it on a large scale, we do find that men reap as they sow, that good comes to the good and evil to the evil.

What, then, we have specially to mark is, (1) that from

the Scriptures we learn nothing of the future life more clearly than this—that every man will then receive according to his deeds, good and bad; and (2) that the Scriptures emphatically bind our future and our present lives together by affirming that one and the self-same law governs them both. If we bear these two facts well in mind and let them control, as they have every right to control, our conceptions of the coming life, we may very wholesomely employ our imagination in the endeavour to picture forth that life in all its variety of detail. Where we commonly err is in making that life as *unlike*, instead of as *like*, this life as we can; and, consequently, in depicting for ourselves scenes of an imaginary perfection and blessedness on which we are so unfit to enter that they would bring us no blessedness. If we avoid this error, we may give a loose rein and the widest scope to our imagination.

But here it may be objected: "What have you left for imagination to do? And, again, if the future life even of the good is to be like this life, ruled by the same law and chequered by the same variety, in what is it better than this?"

The answer is plain. Whether or not the ruling moral bias of any man's life will be changed after death, we cannot tell perhaps: this point we do not now consider. But in so far as the good are concerned, what better prospect can they desire than that, in the future, they should receive the due reward of their deeds, and even of their bad deeds as well as of their good? We know that in this world the painful results of sin are the best correctives of sin; that we are never so utterly redeemed from our bondage to any evil habit as when, by painful experience of its evil consequence, it grows hateful and intolerable to us: *then* we feel that we must not and cannot any longer live in it. Once redeemed from it *thus*, we are redeemed once for all. And how shall

we hope to be redeemed in the world to come from every trace of evil except as we are taught more fully than we could be taught here how hateful and abominable it is? It does not follow that we shall there be permitted to *act* on the sinful inclinations which only too certainly we carry out of this world with us ; the clearer vision we shall then gain of the Divine Holiness may of itself suffice to make every kind of sin terrible and repulsive to us : but if there is to be no break in the continuity of our life, if we are not to become other men than the men we know, that vision must grow upon us by a gradual revelation ; it may be necessary that we should be trained to receive the unfolding revelation of that Holiness and an increasing participation of it by a discipline exquisitely graduated to our special and varying needs.

Suppose, for example, that on our very entrance into Heaven we are for a while placed under conditions which will remind us of whatever we have done wrongly or defectively on earth, but only remind us of it by giving us opportunities of doing it rightly and in a perfect way. Bad deeds, we teach our children, are not to be mended by good wishes ; they are only to be mended by good deeds : and may not our heavenly Father have to teach us the very lesson we teach them, and set us to mend our bad deeds by good ones, to wipe out the memory and the inward effects of our offences by a willing and cheerful obedience to the very laws we had broken? And if this should be one form of our discipline in Heaven, who that honestly desires to have done with evil, or to atone for evil, or to lessen the sum of evil in the universe, would not heartily rejoice in it? What happier reward, what more divine reward, of our bad deeds could there be than this,—that we should have leave and opportunity for mending them with good deeds?

If, again, we may thus conceive of Heaven, who does not feel that, besides being the most suitable and therefore the happiest place for him, it would also be a place for which, through the grace of God, he is in some sense already fitted? When we think of Heaven as a place reserved for those who are already perfect and of a spotless holiness, we are very sure that we are not fit for it, nor are likely to be made fit by the momentary act of death. Worse still, we fear that even those whom we have loved and lost, however affectionately we may dwell on their many virtues, must also have been unfit to enter a place so pure, raised so far above all the conditions of the life they knew on earth. But if once we accept the principles laid down in Holy Writ, viz., that the future life is to be a continuation of the present life, and that it is to be a correction of the present life, we may then entertain the most cheerful hopes whether for ourselves or for our departed friends.

Guided by these same principles, we may surely indulge the hope that Heaven will afford us scope and opportunity, not only for mending bad deeds with good ones, but also for repeating our good deeds on a larger scale and in a more perfect way. How often does it happen here that, even when we would do good, and *do* do good, evil is still present with us, so that the service we would render whether to God or to our fellows is marred either by the blended and imperfect motives by which we are actuated or by the constrained, ungenial, or otherwise imperfect manner in which we discharge it! And, on the other hand, how sweet and bright is the hope that, when we pass into the next world, and come under its larger happier conditions, we may still move along the same lines of action, and devote ourselves to the very tasks for which we have partly qualified ourselves here, but be actuated in that better service by purer motives and discharge it more genially,

more perfectly, and therefore more effectively! Such a conception of our future life and work, while it is more rational and more scientific, is surely instinct also with a diviner hope and joy than the rewards commonly held out before us. Grown men, I fancy, if they also be thoughtful men, are but little attracted by a heaven of "purling streams and pearly gates"—though even these symbols have a valuable teaching for us when they are rightly interpreted; but the more thoughtful men are, the more surely must they rejoice in the hope that in the life to come they will be taught and enabled to undo the evil they have done in the present life, and to do, from perfect motives and in a perfect way, the good they have only attempted here.

Once more: if, as the Bible teaches, the future life is to be both a continuation and a correction of the present life, we may well hope that we shall then become all that we now desire or affect to be. This thought may be applied in many ways to all the details of human life, and the more clear and homely our application of it the more likely is it to prove helpful to us. Here, for example, is a man who assumes to be very pious, more pious than most of his fellows, but who is at heart at least as devoted to the affairs of business or to social pleasures as he is to the service of God. He is sincere in his goodness so far as it goes, but he contrives to convey the impression to his neighbours that it goes much further than it does. If this man should die, what better reward can he have for his sincere but imperfect and somewhat ostentatious goodness than that he should be gradually compelled to become all that he has professed, all that in his best moments he has desired to be—as godly, as devout, as liberal, as large-hearted and kind? Here, again, is another man, good at heart and not without power as a preacher of the Word, but comparatively, yet possibly through no fault of his own, uncultured and unlearned.

Unhappily, above all for himself, he wishes to pass for a man of learning and erudition. In some of the mysterious ways which must be open to such men he contrives to purchase for himself a good degree, and struts before the world a full-blown Doctor of Divinity. Even after he has obtained his degree he takes no pains to make himself worthy of it, but continues to be an unlettered, though not altogether a simple, man to the end. When he dies, what happier fate can befall him than that he should be sent to school in Heaven, be taught to handle his grammars and lexicons and schemes of Divinity, and so be compelled to become what he professed and aspired to be, and walk the golden streets a perfectly honest man at last?

We may well hope that at least the *initiatory* discipline of Heaven may be one which in various ways will compel us all to become all that we have wished, and tried, and failed to be. Other, larger, and still happier steps of an ascending progress may lie before us; but will it not be much for us if, in the first stage of the future life, we are taught and enabled to become what we have professed and desired to be, so that we have no longer anything to hide, no longer anything to fear from the voices which proclaim in the light whatever has been done in darkness, and publish from the housetop whatever has been done in the chamber? To become honest, true, genuine to the inmost core of our being; to have all the moral and spiritual faculties of which we are dimly conscious here happily unfolded and developed: in our measure to become righteous even as our Father in heaven is righteous, and perfect even as He is perfect,—will not this in very deed be Heaven to us who have so long striven to hide our imperfections behind a veil even as we have walked in the dim and clouded atmosphere of this lower world?

II. THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE.

GALATIANS ii. 20 ; ST. JOHN xiv. 2, 3 ; xvii. 24.

The Christian teaching, that death means life, and more abundant life, sounds like a paradox. But, if it be a paradox, it is not peculiar to the Christian Faith. Throughout the universe, life is conditioned by death, and every advance in life implies and necessitates death. Nothing can live save as it extracts nourishment from air, or water, or earth, or from vegetable and animal tissues, by a process which involves the decomposition of that on which it feeds. A thousand good creatures of God die every year that I may live ; and that I may grow, I myself am for ever dying in a thousand different forms. Processes of waste and reparation, of loss and gain, of destruction and reconstruction, are essential to all life, and to all advance in life. That which we commonly call "death" is but the last visible gradation of a series which no man can number ; and as all previous deaths are conditions of life, so also, so pre-eminently, is the last. To die, to fling off "this muddy vesture of decay," is to enter into larger happier conditions, in which psychical processes and developments take the place of physical ; in which we shall live after the spirit, not after the flesh : in which, that is, the highest kind of life we have attained here will move onward and upward towards its ultimate perfection.

We often mourn and complain,—when we have lost those whom we love, we often complain very bitterly—that "in vain our fancy strives to paint the moment after death ;" that we know "so little," or even that we know "nothing," of the state on which they have entered. We forget how much is involved in the mere affirmation that they have entered on a new and higher stage of life,—an affirmation which pervades

the Christian Scriptures from end to end. And we fail to catch and brood over the many hints and intimations of the conditions of that life with which these Scriptures abound. Were we more meditative and more studious, were we even as earnestly bent on discovering what the life to be is like as we commonly assume that we are, we should soon learn so much of the blessed conditions of those who "die in the Lord," that death would be transfigured before our eyes; and, instead of mourning for the happy dead, we should rejoice over them with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is but a little while since I tried to shew* how much reason we have in Holy Writ for believing that the laws of continuity and development hold good, and work as wondrously, in the state after death as confessedly they do in the present stage of our existence; that there is no ground for assuming that death effects a sudden and monstrous change upon us, so that we are no longer the men we were or do not recognize either ourselves or those whom we once knew best: but that, on the contrary, there is much ground for believing that, with identity unchanged and unimpaired, we shall pass into a state in which we shall be surrounded by all happy and favourable conditions, both for shedding off whatever remains imperfect in us and for developing whatever is fair and noble and good. And in the New Testament, besides the scriptures there cited, there are many passages which, while they abundantly confirm that view of the life to come, teem with hints and suggestions which add to and enlarge our conceptions of the heavenly life, if only we brood over them till they yield us their wealth of meaning.

In the present paper I propose to consider only two or three of these passages, in the hope that I may set my readers on considering for themselves the scores of similar

* See pp. 95-105.

passages, with the "letter" of which, at least, they are no doubt familiar.

1. I have already said that we often forget how much is involved in the word "*life*;" how much, therefore, is implied in the assurance that, when we die, we rise into a new and higher form of life. In the New Testament we are told again and again, that they that have done good will enter into life, even as they that have done evil will enter into judgment. But until we reflect upon it, or till some sidelight falls on it, we do not feel the force of this familiar promise. Such a sidelight, such an aid to reflection, we may get from any scripture which describes that passage from death to life through which every believer in Christ enters into vital fellowship with Him. Let us take Galatians ii. 20.

When St. Paul wrote, "Nevertheless I live," he penned words which would form a noble epitaph for the tomb of any man who died in the Lord. But, when he penned those familiar words he was not writing an epitaph; he was rejoicing, not over his death *in* the flesh, but over his death *to* the flesh and sin. "I am crucified with Christ," he said; "*his* death for sin carries with it *my* death to sin. But *though* dead, nay, *because*, dead, I live; nay, more, Christ lives in me." What he meant by this apparent paradox, this life in death, we all know. A gracious change had passed upon him. A pure and noble development of his spiritual life had taken place. Once a sinner, he had found the Friend and Saviour of sinners. Once living to and for himself, he had learned to live for others by learning to live for Christ. Once seeking his own salvation by a strict and rigid adherence to the letter of the law, he was now willing even to become anathema from Christ that his brethren might be saved. Charity had replaced Selfishness as the mainspring and motive of his life. This gracious change

implied a death,—a death to selfishness, to sin, to law, and even to a selfish craving for his own salvation. And this death in its turn implied and was the essential condition of a new, larger, and more generous life. He could *only* live for others as he died to self. He could only live in the spirit as he died to the flesh. He could only live unto God as he died to the world.

Now this interior spiritual change is the highest we can know on this side the grave,—this passing through death into a higher type of life. And, therefore, it yields us our finest and truest illustration of the last change. When we are promised that the death of the body shall conduct us to an ampler and higher spiritual life, we may well believe that at least we shall pass through a change like that we experience at our conversion, like that which St. Paul experienced at his conversion.

Look at the man before and after, then. St. Paul, indeed, remained the very same man after he “saw the Lord” on his way to Damascus; and yet what a different man he became! how much more noble, spiritual, divine! His life was not broken in two, but transfigured. He did not lose his identity; even in the brief record we have of him we can trace the same personal traits, the same characteristic and distinguishing features after he became an apostle as when he was a persecutor and blasphemer: but all these personal traits and characteristics are glorified by the change of motive and aim which had been wrought upon him by the grace of Christ.

On his conversion, moreover, St. Paul did not settle down into a mere tranquil enjoyment of happier spiritual conditions. On the contrary, he was “in labours more abundant” than before. With an inexhaustible and almost incredible energy he set himself to minister to the spiritual necessities of men,—not holding himself aloof from the vile and sinful

as a being of a higher spiritual grade, but going among them as a brother and a friend, shewing them an ineffable tenderness, exhausting himself—"wasting" himself, as he puts it—in the endeavour to raise them to his own level. He felt that he had been called in order that he might call them; that he himself had been saved in order that he might at least "save some."

Does not even this poor and feeble description of the new access of life which attended his conversion suggest a very noble and attractive view of the Christian promise, that for us, too, death is to be life, more life and fuller? If, when we die, we are to *live*, may we not take the greatest change from and through death to life of which we are conscious here as a figure of that last change? We surely may. And, therefore, we may well believe that, when we die, we shall remain the same men and women that we are now, and yet become very different men and women. *Our* life will not be broken in two, but transfigured. We shall not lose our identity; we shall still be ourselves; we shall know and be known: we shall preserve the traits of character which individualize us: but all these personal traits and characteristics will be suffused and glorified by an inward ennobling change of motive and aim. Charity will replace Selfishness. More completely than ever before we shall die to self that we may live for others, die in the flesh that we may live in the spirit, die to sin that we may live in holiness, die to imperfection that we may share the perfect life of God. It is no lazy and corrupting Paradise that lies before us, in which we shall loll on flowery meads, clothed in white raiment, with crowns on our heads and harps in our hands; but a spacious animated Heaven in which God's love for the sinful and imperfect will beat in our breast and his labours for their salvation will engage our hands. Its white garments do but symbolize the unspotted holiness which

will enable us, as it enabled Christ, to be the friends of sinners without being stained and defiled by their sins. Its crowns are but the symbols of a victory which will remain imperfect till all can share it with us. Its harps are the symbols, not of sweet self-pleasing melodies with which we shall drown the cries of the lost, but of a noble music by which we shall seek to minister to minds diseased, and to bring a "pure concert" into hearts jangled and out of tune with the discords of selfishness and disobedience.

And if *this* be the meaning of "life," spiritual and eternal life, who will not, who ought not to desire it? What more noble end can any man set before himself than to become a partaker of the life which throbbed in the breast of St. Paul, nay, which beat, and still beats, in the very heart of Christ Himself? What room is there for the charge that, in seeking Heaven, we are aiming at a merely personal reward, and sinking into the selfishness from which it is the very office of Religion to deliver us, if *this* be the heaven we seek,—a heaven in which we are to have life, and to have it more abundantly, in which we are to develop our highest powers harmoniously, that we may more efficiently minister to the general welfare, that we may take part in the work of God and of Christ, and perchance even seek out and save that which is still lost? Till men can teach us a sublimer aim, and shew us a nobler Heaven, we must needs cling to this.

2. In St. John xiv. 2, 3, we read, "In my Father's house are many mansions: *if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Space would fail were I to attempt to bring out half the suggestions of this familiar but noble passage. What most impresses me personally in it is the phrase, commonly overlooked,—*"If it were not so, I would have told you."* That would

have been very hard work for Christ,—harder even, I think, than to die for our sins. Had He had to come and tell us that there was no home for us in Heaven, and no hope for us hereafter, surely his pitiful and compassionate heart would have broken under the strain. That He could so much as conceive Himself doing it is wonderful. Yet He assures us that He *would* have told us so if it had been true. And what a solemn impress of truth his assurance leaves on what He did tell us! viz., that in his Father's house are many mansions, and that He is even now occupied in preparing a suitable place for each one of us.

The figure which gave form to his thoughts was, doubtless, that of the Hebrew Temple, with its spacious courts and its innumerable chambers, in which a vast multitude found a home, and some task to do for God, and some worship in which they might take part,—in which porters and singers, beggars and children, found a home, as well as the rabbis and the priests. Viewed under this figure, Heaven is a mighty Temple, the abiding-place of the Almighty, in which He is worshipped day and night; and in this Temple are not only broad “courts” in which all may serve and praise Him, but many “mansions,” each appropriately furnished, in which they may reside: and in these mansions a special “place” for each one of them which Christ is preparing for their reception,—exquisitely adapting it, that is, to their special tastes and needs, to the task they will have to do, and to the happy and harmonious development of their individual character and bent.

When we are told in general terms that, after death, we shall possess *life* for evermore, the mere promise of life is full of happy suggestions for us, so soon as we reflect on what an access of spiritual life involves. But “life” is a large word, and we crave something more special and definite. Here it is, then, in this gracious assurance that

there are many mansions in our Father's house, each adapted to the wants of this class or that (or why are there "many" of them?), yet all under one roof; and that, in some one of these mansions, a special and suitable "place" is being prepared for each of us. Not only, therefore, shall we preserve our identity in the world beyond the grave, but that identity will be respected and provided for. All that is most characteristic in us will have its due training and environment. He who knows us best, He who knows us altogether, is even now taking thought for us, considering what conditions we need, what tasks, what discipline, what companions, what joys, and getting them all ready for us against we come. The whole large world of Heaven is ordered by his infinite wisdom and love; its whole society is organized by Him, and so organized that we shall each find in it the very place we are fitted to fill, the very work we are able to do, the very training and auspicious conditions that we severally require.

Is not this, too, a happy and attractive conception of Heaven? Is there anything base or selfish in craving such a Heaven as this? If we heartily believed in it, should we lament that even our dearest friend was called to enter it?

3. In St. John xvii. 24, we read that, as He prayed our Lord said: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, *that they may behold my glory!*" If we linger on that last phrase till we feel what is meant and involved in beholding the glory of Christ, we get a new conception of the heavenly blessedness. We behold Him manifesting forth his glory as we read the Gospels. What would we give, what would we *not* give, for another Gospel, with new stories of his wondrous life from day to day, with new parables as tender and charming as that of the Good Shepherd, or the Good Samaritan, or the Prodigal Son, and new discourses as calm and simple and

profound as the Sermon on the Mount ! God could give us such another Gospel ; for if all the things which Jesus did and said should be written every one, we should have a new and larger Bible ; and doubtless He *would* give us a new Gospel, or even a new Bible, if it would be good for us to have it.

How often, too, do we wish we could have seen but a part of the Gospel story *enacted*, that we could have walked with Christ, if only for a single day, and have seen the mighty works He did and heard the gracious words that fell from his lips !

But what, after all, would new records of his earthly life be, or what even that we should have seen his face and listened to his words as He walked among men, compared with that which lies before us ? The Past holds much which we shall never willingly let die ; but it is in the Future that our true home lies and our true blessedness. We, who would give much to read a new Gospel, much also could we have witnessed one of Christ's works or have listened to but one of his discourses, are to see a whole new Gospel enacted before our eyes, and *that* as much more glorious than the Gospels written by the Evangelists as heaven is higher than the earth ! We are to behold Christ in his glory. And it will not be a dumb Christ on whom we shall look, or an inert inactive Christ, but a living, transfigured, glorified Christ, whose words will still give life and whose acts will still be acts of mercy and love. We shall see Him as the favoured Three saw Him on the Mount, but in a light even brighter than that of the sun. We shall see Him as St. Paul and St. John saw Him in vision, when they were caught up into Paradise, and beheld wonders and listened to words which could not be uttered in the tongues of our imperfection ; but we shall see Him more clearly than they who had but eyes of flesh, and more continuously, for we shall go out of his Presence no more

for ever. And, best of all, as we behold Him in his glory, we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, until we are *satisfied* with his likeness.

As we meditate on these and kindred hints of the glory that awaits us, our hearts are filled with an unconquerable hope, an unutterable thankfulness ; the sting is taken from death, the victory from the grave. If only we could heartily, and at all times, believe in this high teaching, we should neither fear death for ourselves, nor mourn when those who are dear to us as our own soul are called to pass through that dark Portal which, though it rear itself so frowningly before our eyes, glows with the light of life on the *inward* side. If only we heartily believed that those whom we have lost are with Christ, the same as we knew them, with all their familiar traits and affections, but yet transfigured by a great ennobling change of motive and aim ; if we believed that, when they died, Christ came to receive them to Himself and to instal them in that mansion, that place, which He had made ready for them, and in which they now find tasks, services, training, joys exactly and exquisitely adapted to unfold all that is best and highest in them : if we believed that they now behold his glory, that they see Him enacting a new and greater Gospel than that of his earthly life,—how could we dare to mourn for them ? how should we not, rather, rejoice that they had been delivered out of the pains and imperfections of this present world into such joy and felicity as *that* ? Nor could death have any terror for *us* if only we were heartily assured that, when we die, we too shall live unto God ; that He will receive us into his house, into his family, where, surrounded by all blessed and auspicious conditions, we shall move onward and upward, from court to court of the heavenly temple, until we stand in the very presence-chamber of the Lord Almighty and All-gracious.

We believe in God, and in Christ; let us also believe in his revelation of the life to come.

III. THE SUGGESTIONS OF THE RAINBOW.

REVELATION VI. 3.

THE rainbow appears, and vanishes, and reappears in the biblical very much as it does in the natural world. It spans the sky of the very first book in the Bible, where it is raised to the power of a covenant—made the symbol of the most generous and unconditional of covenants, a covenant in which God pledges Himself, but exacts no pledge from man. It reappears in the writings of the prophets; their allusions to the covenant with Noah being frequent and pathetic. And, finally, in the very last book of the Bible, it is raised to a still higher power, and shines round the throne of God in heaven.

A phenomenon so lovely, so delicate and spiritual, as the rainbow has naturally excited the imagination, not of the poets alone, but even of the commentators, who, not very justly I think, are commonly regarded as the dullest and least imaginative of men. They have found in it a symbol of whatever unites in itself the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine; and some of the earlier of them ventured to call Christ Himself "the Rainbow," because in his person the human and the Divine natures are reconciled and commingled. But so to generalize the spiritual meaning and intention of the rainbow is to cast away that which is special and peculiar to it; for there are many other natural phenomena which blend earthly and heavenly elements. Here, as almost everywhere else, the simplest and most obvious interpretation of the symbol is at once the most definite and the best. And by any unsophisticated mind the dark raincloud across which the bow is bent is taken as

a symbol of the sins by which men obscure their inner heaven, or of the judgments which dog their sins ; while the sunshine which casts the bow on the cloud is taken as a symbol of the Divine Love that absolves men from their sins, of that Mercy which is the final intention of judgment. So often as this fair and delicate apparition appears in the sky, hallowing and etherealizing the tear-besprinkled earth, we are reminded of the cleansing power of penitence, of the Compassion which seeks to make our lives the brighter and the sweeter for our very sins, of the lavish and inalienable Goodness which, by a divine alchemy, draws new promise and new hope even from our darkest transgressions. It is impossible—if at least we give our natural piety fair play—to look thoughtfully at the bow shining in a sky in which light is at the point to triumph over darkness, bending over an earth sweetened and enriched by the very rains which have fallen on it, and transfiguring it into a pure and mystic beauty, without receiving from it, as our first and deepest impression, an assurance that “ God’s love is more than all our sins,” that somehow good is to be the final goal of ill, that the whole creation is moving on to some far-off divine event which will solve all the problems and redress all the wrongs of time. The sun does not shine on every shower, nor glorify every cloud ; but when it does shine on and through the streaming rain, it throws a light of promise over the world. And therefore the rainbow is an incarnate promise ; it is the very embodiment of hope. It speaks, or should speak, to us of a time when evil shall be overcome by good. It assures us that there *is* an answer to all the problems by which we are perplexed, though perhaps we cannot reach it yet, and that we *shall* reach and rejoice in it some day. It assures us that there is a remedy for all the ills under which we groan, and that this remedy will be applied, if not within, yet beyond the borders and coasts of time.

And perhaps the fact that both the prophet Ezekiel and the seer in the Isle of Patmos saw a rainbow *round the throne of heaven* may involve a hint that, so long as we are compassed about with the infirmities and limitations of the flesh, we must not expect to solve the problems, or to escape the trials, which afflict us now and here ; it may imply that only when that which is spiritual has come, only when we ourselves have become "pure heavenly," only when we stand before the throne, will the long, sad, mysterious story of Time unfold its true meaning, and all the way in which God has led us be explained and justified by the end to which it has conducted us.

To us, as to Noah and his family, the rainbow is a sign, a proof, a prediction that mercy is to rejoice over judgment : to them it brought the assurance that, let men sin as they would, God would never again sweep them away with a flood ; and to us it brings the assurance that, let men sin as they may, and whatever the miseries they may breed by their sins for a time, all the darkneses and sorrows of human life are to be penetrated and suffused by the transfiguring light of the Divine Love. It suggests that the end is to vindicate and crown the work of God.

No promise is more welcome to us than this ; and therefore it has a fitting symbol in the rainbow, than which no natural phenomenon is more delicately beautiful or more suggestive of hope. But no promise is more incredible to us ; for we see neither that it is being, nor how it is to be, accomplished ; and therefore it is, I suppose, that as the rainbow gleams along the whole Bible from end to end, so this promise of the final victory of good is wrought into the very substance of Scripture from its commencement to its close. In the very first book of the Bible we hear of a salvation committed, for a time, to a single race, in order that, through them, all the families of the earth may be

blessed. And from that time onward the promise grows ever more full and distinct. Thus Isaiah never wearies of depicting the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness shall dwell. Joel breaks into an ecstasy as he sees the Spirit of God poured out *on all flesh*— young men and maidens, old men and children, freemen and slaves. Zephaniah can rejoice in the very judgments of Jehovah, because he sees that by these God will turn *to the nations* a pure lip and cause them to serve Him with one shoulder, until *all the isles of the heathen*, every one from its place, shall worship Him. In like manner Habakkuk looks through all the clouds and terrors of time, and sees *the whole earth* filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the deep. Malachi affirms that men are passed through the furnace which burns up all unrighteousness, only that *from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof* God's name may be great among the nations, and that *in every place* incense may be burned to his name, and a pure worship be offered on the altar of the universal heart. The Gospels reveal a Sacrifice which taketh away the sin *of the world*, a Cross which is to draw *all men* to Christ and change them into his image, and a kingdom which is to rule over all. St. Paul affirms that God has shut up all under sin, that He may have mercy on *all*. St. Peter speaks of a salvation which extends even to Hades, throws open the prison-doors of the disobedient dead, and rescues even the guilty race which was swept away by the Flood. And in the last book of the Bible St. John rifles the whole universe of its splendours in order to set forth the glory of that city and kingdom in which *the nations* of the saved walk in white. True, there is another side to this bright and glowing picture. The very prophets, who labour to depict the wide all-embracing sweep of the Divine Compassion and Love, speak also of searching and terrible judgments to be executed on the ungodly both in this world

and in that which is to come. But what we have to mark is that they speak of these very judgments as designed to cleanse and purify either men or the world in which they are to dwell; and that beyond these dark clouds of judgment they invariably see a land of righteousness and peace and joy, a whole world of renewed men walking in a new earth and beneath a new heaven.

We need not faintly trust the larger hope, therefore. We may be sure that our largest hopes for men will be transcended. And we need the assurance, and to be constantly reminded of it. For we are too apt to walk with eyes fixed on the ground, or lifted only to take in the narrow range of facts and events immediately around us. And *here*, we can often detect no sign of progress, no prophecy of hope. *We* are so weak and so wicked, and the world close around us is, for the most part, not only weak, but so unconscious of its weakness—not only wicked, but so indifferent to its wickedness—that we often lose hope both for ourselves and for the world at large. We need, therefore, to look out on human life through the eyes of the prophets, and to see the vast prophetic hope which, for them at least, stretches across the whole horizon and sheds down its clear spiritual light on the whole family of man. The clouds just above and around us may be dark and threatening; a cold and bitter rain may be falling on us: but, see, the sun is breaking through the clouds, and shining on them; faint and broken gleams of colour tremble through the air, melt into each other, and take definite form; the bow spans the sky, and, under its magical hues, the whole earth is transformed; the birds break forth into singing, the flowers kindle their censers and fill the air with fragrance. We all know what lovely and delicate transformations take place as the bow gleams forth on the clouds; how it seems at once to hallow and to brighten the earth, so that, standing beneath

its vast mystic arch, we feel as though we had entered some great temple and were taking part in an act of solemn and elevating worship. And the change thus wrought on the face of nature, or on the eyes with which we regard it, is not more pure and gladdening than the change wrought upon our hearts when once we grasp the truth it symbolizes and rest upon it. To believe that, because God is love, He is for ever educing good from ill, and that, through all its sins and miseries, the world is passing on to righteousness, charity, peace—this is, as it were, to have a rainbow for ever shining in our beclouded hearts; it is to gain a clear sustaining hope which hallows and spiritualizes our whole conception of human life. With this great hope for the world's future, we cease to mind earthly things; for our hearts are set on seeing men grow, not in power, or wealth, or ease, but in righteousness and love. And from this hope, moreover, we draw strength and courage for all our endeavours to raise men and better them. We cannot despair of a world which God is saving, which He has declared that He will save at all costs. We cannot forbode failure for any enterprise which is honestly intended to instruct or elevate it; for we know that, in taking part in them, we are working towards the very end which God Himself has in view.

And while we gain this large hope for the world, we may also gain a better hope, and therefore a more steadfast design and a firmer endeavour, for our individual lives. There is a latent rainbow in every single drop of dew, as well as in the streaming shower. And there must be hope for every man, or how could there be hope for all men? *We*, we may be sure, are included, in common with our fellows in the vast design which embraces the renewal of the human race, the salvation of the world.

And if any of us are called to pass through many and searching sorrows, we shall do well to remember that those

who live in the high lands, and are most exposed to shower and storm, see most of the rainbow too. To be much exposed to trial is to be brought very near to that Love, touched by which all clouds grow bright with hope.

Nor do I think it fanciful to derive from the Scripture use of the rainbow a hint on that great mystery, the purpose and function of evil. We soon grow weary of staring colours and blazing suns; but who ever grew weary of the subdued and tender hues of the rainbow? And, perchance, the irradiation of our sin-obscured lives by the steadfast love of God may yield a more tender and pathetic beauty, a beauty more various and mystical, than the clear outshining of his goodwill in cloudless skies. Man *may* rise by his very fall, and become the more like God by a knowledge of good and evil.*

But as yet I have only touched on the rainbow and its spiritual suggestions, its incentives to hope; I have said nothing about the rainbow *round the throne* of heaven, or nothing beyond this: that, probably, the rainbow is carried on and up into heaven in order to intimate that its prediction of a happy solution to all the problems of time will be fulfilled only when we enter heaven and put on immortality. But do we thus exhaust the meaning of the position given to the bow of hope in the passage before us? We do not even touch what I take to be its chief meaning. If St. John transfers earthly symbols to the heavenly world, it is only reasonable to assume that he uses them in their familiar sense, in order that he may thus convey to us some faint conception of mysteries which we do not comprehend. If he uses them in a wholly new sense, what can they teach us of the new world into which he lifts our thoughts? No, we may be sure that he uses them in their old sense, and wishes us to transfer the conceptions they suggest into that

* Genesis iii. 22.

strange heavenly world. But in that case heaven can hardly be either the place, or the state, which many of us have assumed it to be. For, as we have seen, the rainbow is the symbol of a heavenly light shining on earthly clouds; it is the symbol of a Divine Love penetrating, suffusing, transfiguring, the wrongs and sins and miseries of time: it is a prophecy of the final triumph of good over evil. And if there is a rainbow in the sky of heaven, must there not be problems there which we shall not be able to solve, and perhaps sufferings the full meaning of which we shall not be able to see, even though we are being made perfect by them? Must not the rainbow round the throne be intended to remind us that, even in heaven, God, and God's ways, must remain inscrutable to us, and to promise us that, as we advance in the heavenly life and get nearer to "the throne," we shall nevertheless more and more fully apprehend Him and his ways? It may be that when we reach the heavenly shore, we shall be able to look back and see our earthly life in a new light which will explain and justify it to us; but in that new and vaster life on which we shall then enter must there not be much which we cannot grasp at once, and perhaps even a discipline in wisdom and holiness which will be so far in advance of that whereunto we have attained as that, at times, it may pain and perplex us?

Opposed as such a conception of Heaven may be to the assumptions current in the Church, it is in full accord with the teachings both of reason and of Holy Writ. St. John, for example, tells us in the immediate context,* that he saw a door opened in heaven, that he went through the door, and beheld the worship of the heavenly temple. In a pause of the worship a strong angel brings a sacred roll, a scripture—or rather seven scriptures in one roll, each of which has its own seal—and demands who will break the

* Revelation iv. and v.

seal and read the writings. Here, then, was a mystery in heaven; here was a sealed scripture, containing a sevenfold disclosure of the Divine Will; and of all the inhabitants of heaven not one was "found worthy" or able "to open the book, or even to look thereon." Only the Lamb could do that. And whatever else and more all this may mean, can it mean less than this,—that, at least at the date at which St. John wrote, there were mysteries of the Divine Will utterly unfathomable to the denizens of heaven until Christ interpreted those mysteries to them?

So, again, in Chapter vi. verse 9, we are told that St. John saw the souls of the martyrs gathered under the altar on which they had been slain, and heard them cry out with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Here, once more, was a mystery in heaven, a painful and perplexing mystery—justice postponed, if not denied, and the souls of the faithful martyrs held back, in some ineffable way, from the reward for which they yearned.

Now surely, if St. John's picture of the heavenly world has any truth or force for us, that world must include in it many problems not solved, or solvable, by the intellect of the redeemed, and some which even press painfully on their hearts.

And can any modest and reasonable man suppose that, the very moment he enters heaven, *he* will comprehend the mysteries which St. John could make nothing of till an interpreting angel was sent to explain them to him? that he will at once, or ever, master *all* the wonders and secrets of the spiritual world? Can any modest and reasonable man imagine that he will find out the Almighty to perfection the very instant he is admitted to his presence? Must not the Infinite ever remain a mystery to the finite? Must

not God ever be, and do, that which it will task, and perplex, and baffle our feeble intellects to explain and vindicate?

Nor let any man say that *this* is but a poor heaven as compared with that which he has been wont to anticipate. If it seem poorer to any man, that is only because it is so much greater and richer. For what can be a more noble and attractive prospect to any reflective and devout mind than this : to be always advancing in wisdom and holiness, yet ever to see stretching before us new fields of wisdom to be traversed, new attainments to be won ; to be ever drawing nearer to God, yet ever to find in Him new wonders, new depths, new claims on our confidence and love and praise? If there be *a cloud* of impenetrable mystery around his throne, *a rainbow* gleams upon the cloud, assuring us that the cloud is big with mercy, fraught with benediction, and that, while we shall come to apprehend its wonders as we press onward, we shall nevertheless find in them ever new wonders to awe and attract and delight our souls. It is the wonder of *this* world—the secrets to be discovered in it, the anomalies which are for ever being reduced to law, the apparent discords and contradictions which are for ever being resolved into harmony, which render it so attractive, so instructive, so dear to us. And shall the heavenly world be poorer and less wonderful than this? We may be sure that it is not. We may be sure that when we rise into it, we shall enter into a vast realm of wonders, transcending not our present powers of conception alone but all finite powers, a world ever new, ever various, ever beckoning us on to new endeavours and new attainments. To the thoughtful and devout no prospect can be more alluring ; to them, therefore, the very throne of God grows the more beautiful, and the more precious, for the rainbow round about the throne.

IV.

Jehovah's Answer to Job's Doubts.

JOB XXXVIII.-XLII.

“**T**HEN the Lord answered Job out of the tempest.”
And what did He say? The reply to that question has disappointed and perplexed even candid and thoughtful minds for more than a thousand years; it still perplexes and disappoints every earnest student of the Word. For when the only wise God speaks, we expect to hear the perfect utterance of a perfect wisdom; when He answers, we expect his answer to be complete, final, conclusive. But his answer to Job seems incomplete, illogical, inconclusive.

Driven from the peace of faith by the scourge of Calamity, Job passes through the agonies of doubt and fear, of wounded trust and love. In the excitement of his agony he gives the most varied and magnificent expression to the fluctuating passions of a heart torn from its rest, to the questions which we all ask but cannot answer, to the great moral problems which we all raise but cannot solve, when we are brought face to face with the mysteries of Providence and human life. His friends yield him no help, but simply aggravate the burden of his grief: as we follow them through the several cycles of the Poem, we cry with Job himself, “Miserable comforters are ye all!” we feel, as he felt, that they do but “darken counsel with words devoid of wisdom.” Even Elihu has little help to give, and knows it. He con-

vinces us, indeed, that Job was in the wrong in that he justified himself rather than God, and that his "friends" were still more hopelessly in the wrong in that they could not answer Job and yet condemned him. But "this wise young man," this earlier "Daniel come to judgment," cannot himself answer, though he will not condemn, Job; he feels that he has no adequate reply to the deep and awful problems in which the afflicted Patriarch is entangled. *He* is not the Light, but has come to bear witness to the Light; he cannot justify the ways of God to men: he can only prepare the way for the Lord, who, Himself, is coming to end and crown the argument.

As Elihu's eloquent rebukes draw to a close, our hearts grow full of expectation and hope. The mighty tempest in which Jehovah shrouds Himself sweeps up through the darkened heaven; it draws nearer and nearer; we "hear the tumult of his voice;" we are blinded by "the flash which He hurls to the ends of the earth:" our hearts "throb and leap out of their place,"* and we say, "God will speak, and there will be light." But God speaks, and there is no light. He does not answer one of the questions Job has asked, nor solve one of the problems Job has raised. He simply overwhelms us with his majesty. He causes his "glory" to pass before us. He claims to have all power in heaven and on earth, to be Lord of the day and of the night, of the tempest and of the calm. He simply asserts, what no one has denied, that all the processes of Nature and all the changes of Providence are his handiwork; that it is He who calleth forth the stars and determines their influences on the earth, He who sendeth rain and fruitful seasons, He who provideth food for the birds and beasts and gives them their beauty, their strength, and the manifold wise instincts by which they are preserved and multi-

* Job xxxvii. 1-5.

plied. He does not utter a single word to relieve the mysteries of his Providence, to explain why the good suffer and the wicked prosper, why He permits our hearts to be so often torn by agonies of bereavement, of misgiving, of doubt. When the majestic Voice ceases we are no nearer than before to a solution of the haunting problems of life ; we can only wonder that Job should sink in utter love and self-abasement before Him ; we can only ask *what* it is that has thus shed calm, and order, and an invincible faith into his perturbed and doubting spirit. We say : " This beautiful Poem is a logical failure ; it does not carry its profound theme to any satisfactory conclusion, nay, nor to *any* conclusion : it suggests doubts to which it makes no reply, problems that it does not even attempt to solve : after patient study of it, and with the keenest sense of its charm and power as a work of art, we are none the wiser for having studied it."

Most of those who have really read this Poem must have closed it with some such feeling as that which has just been expressed. Even those who hold it to be the most perfect and sublime poem with which man was ever inspired acknowledge that it does not explain the mysteries with which it undertakes to deal, that the answer of Jehovah is no true answer to the agonized questions and protest of Job. And we can only echo their acknowledgment. We admit that this marvellous Poem does not " assert eternal Providence " so as to satisfy the intellect and " justify the ways of God to men." We admit that it suggests questions which it does not answer, and to which we know no answer, and problems which it does not solve, and to which we can find no solution save that of faith and trust and love.

1. But is it so certain as we sometimes think it to be that this Poem was *intended* to explain the mysteries of human life ? is it certain that God meant it to answer the doubtful

questions it suggests? is it certain even that a logical answer to these questions is either possible or desirable?

Let us at least remember that *all* the books which handle the theme of Job, even now that the true Light has come into the world, are equally unsatisfactory and disappointing to the logical intellect. From the "Confessions" of Augustine down to Dr. Newman's "History of my Religious Opinions," there have been hundreds of books that have professed to give the history of an inquisitive human spirit sounding its dim and perilous way across dark seas of Doubt to the clear rest and haven of Faith; but read which of these we may, we observe these two phenomena: first, that so long as the author sets forth the doubts and perplexities by which he has been exercised, we find his words instinct with life, and passion, and power; they commend themselves to our understanding and excite our sympathy; we feel that he is happily expressing thoughts and emotions which have often stirred within our own souls. But—and this is the second and more striking phenomenon—no sooner does he begin to tell us what it was that conquered his doubts, to describe the several steps by which he climbed back to faith, to explain how much larger and firmer his faith now is than it was before it was tried; no sooner does he enter on this climax of his work than—unless, indeed, we have passed through an experience similar to his—a thick bewildering haze settles down on his words; we read them, but they are no longer instinct with life and force; they do not commend themselves to our judgment, nor convince our reason. We cry in disappointment, "What, is that all? What was there in *that* to induce faith? The man has not fairly met one of his doubts, nor solved one of his problems; he has simply evaded them, and crept, by an illogical bye-path, to a most lame and impotent conclusion."

No man who, "perplexed in faith," has read books of this

class, hoping to find in them aids to faith and answers to doubt, can be an entire stranger to this sensation of disappointment and defeated hope. Written, as such books commonly are, by wise and good men, men of the most genuine sincerity and earnestness; written, too, for the express purpose of leading the sceptical inquirer from doubt to faith, there is no one of them which does not disappoint us just as the Book of Job disappoints us. They may command our admiration; they may touch our hearts; but they do not satisfy our reason nor answer our doubts: they fail just at the one only point at which we are concerned for their success.

What should the fact teach us? Surely it should teach us that the path of logic is not the path to faith. It should lead us to ask whether it may not be impossible to solve, in human words, and to the human intellect, the mystery of God's dealings with men, whether, if possible, it would not be undesirable. Logic can do much, but not all. It may convince the reason, but it cannot bend the will or cleanse the heart. Prove to me, if proof be possible, that God is good in permitting pain and sorrow and loss to come upon me; but if I do not *feel*, or want to feel, that He is good, and do not love Him for his goodness, mere proof will not do much for me. "*With the heart* man believeth unto righteousness;" and logic does not address itself to the heart. It is doubtful, even, whether the human intellect, at least while it is prisoned in the flesh, could so comprehend the infinite providence of God as to prove its equity and kindness, or even understand the proof, if proof were to be had; but it is very certain that, were such a proof within our reach, we might still distrust his goodness, and even hate it when it thwarted and pained us.

If proof were possible, if God could inspire and man could write an argument which should once for all inter-

pret our life to us, which should solve all its problems and disperse every shade of mystery, it is still open to doubt whether it would be kind of God to inspire it; or, rather, it is very certain that it would not be kind. For the mystery which encompasses us on every side is an educational force of the utmost value. We fret against it, indeed, and strive to be quit of it: and it is well that we do; for it is this very strife and fret by which we are strengthened, by which our character is developed, and by which we are compelled to look up to Heaven for guidance and consolation. If we no longer had any questions to ask, any problems to solve, if we saw the full meaning and final purpose of God's dealing with us, we should lose more than we should gain. With certainty we might be content; and we might *rest* in our content. But with mystery within us and on every side of us, compelling us to ask, "What does this mean? and that? and above all, what does God mean by it all?" we lose the rest of content to gain a strife of thought which trains and educates us, which for ever leads us onward and upward, and for which, in the end, we shall be all the wiser, and better, and happier. It may be, it surely is, inevitable that, with an infinite God over us, and around us, and within us, we, finite men, should be encompassed by mysteries we cannot fathom; that, if the mysteries which now perplex us were removed, they would only give place to mysteries still more profound. Even logic suggests so much as this. But quite apart from speculation, here stands the fact,—that it *is* part of God's scheme for our training that evil and pain should be in the world, that they should excite in us questions we should not otherwise have asked, and endeavours after freedom and holiness we should not otherwise have made. And God is wise. His scheme for us is at least likely to be better than any we could frame for ourselves. But if it be his scheme to educate us by the mysteries around us, and the questions

and endeavours those mysteries excite, He can give us no book, no argument, no revelation which would dispel those mysteries; the craving intellect *must* be left unsatisfied in order that faith may have scope; the mental faculties must be perplexed both that they themselves may be strengthened by exercise, and that the moral faculties, which are even more valuable and of a superior force, may be trained for their lofty task.

What is it that kindles and trains the intelligence of our children, that chastens their will and develops their moral qualities and powers? Is it not that a mysterious world lies all around them, a world in which things look differently from what they are and hold out another promise than that which they fulfil:—is it not *this* which for ever sets them asking questions which we can very hardly answer, and wondering over marvels which we perhaps have ceased to admire? Is it not the uncertainty as to what the next moment may bring or teach which makes their eyes bright with expectation and hope? Is it not because *we* often do that which they cannot comprehend, and even that which pains and disappoints and perplexes them,—is it not this which braces and enlarges their character and makes room for faith and trust and love? If we could condense all the wisdom of the world and of life into a tiny manual which they could master at an early age, should we venture to place it in their hands? If we did, we should simply rob them of their youth, of their keen enjoyment of the changes and surprises of life: imperfectly and by rote they would acquire what they now learn so much more truly and thoroughly and happily by experience and by efforts which strengthen and develop them. God teaches us, then, as we teach our children—by the mystery of life, by its illusions and contradictions, by its intermixtures of good with evil, of joy with sorrow; by the questions we are compelled to ask even

although we cannot answer them ; by the problems we are compelled to study although we cannot solve them. And is not his way the best way ?

2. We have seen how and why the Book of Job disappoints us, why the answer of Jehovah strikes us as of an insufficient logic. Can we now see how it came to pass that this insufficient logic was nevertheless sufficient for Job ; how it was that this answer, which answered nothing to the intellect, satisfied him, nay, swept away all his doubts and fears in the transport of gratitude and love into which it threw him ?

We often *make* the difficulties over which we perplex ourselves in vain, and then look for answers everywhere but straight before our eyes. Thus, for instance, when we read that "Jehovah answered Job out of the tempest," we forthwith ask, "And what did He say?" expecting to hear some conclusive argument that will pour the light of eternal wisdom on the difficulties and perplexities of human life : we overlook the immense pathos and force of the fact, *that Jehovah spake to Job at all*. And yet, so soon as we think of it, it is easy to believe that, if Job had not understood a single word Jehovah uttered, the mere fact that Jehovah spoke to him would excite a rush of emotion before which all memory of his doubts and miseries would be carried away as with a flood. *This*, indeed, was that which Job had craved throughout. In how many forms does he cry, "O that God would meet me ! O that He would speak to me ! O that He would fix a day, however distant, in which to visit me and hear my plea ! O that He would even come to question and judge me !" The pain at the very heart of his pain was not that he had to suffer, but that in his sufferings God had forgotten and abandoned him. He could bear that God should "take" the children He had given. He could bear to receive

“evil” at the Hand from which he had received so much good. He could even bear that his “friends” should forsake him in his calamity, that they should sit in judgment on him and condemn him for crimes which he knew he had not committed. What he could not bear was that *God* should abandon him, *abandon* as well as afflict him, that when he cried for pity or redress Heaven should not respond.

I have sinned !

Yet what have I done to Thee, O Thou Watcher of men ?

Why hast Thou made me thy target,

So that I am become a burden unto myself ?

And why wilt Thou not pardon my transgression,

And cause my sin to pass away ? *

* * * * *

If it be that I have erred,

My error rests with myself.

But if ye will magnify yourselves against me,

And urge against me my reproach,

Know ye that God hath wrested my cause,

And flung his net about me.

Behold, I exclaim at my wrong, but am not answered ;

I cry aloud, but there is no justice !

He hath fenced up my ways, so that I cannot pass,

And set darkness in my paths.

Have pity on me, have pity on me, O ye my friends !

For the hand of God hath touched me !

Why should ye persecute me, like God,

And not be satisfied with my pangs ? †

* * * * *

Still is my complaint bitter,

And my stroke heavier than my groaning.

O that I knew where I might find Him !

I would press even unto his seat ;

I would set out my cause before Him,

And fill my mouth with pleas :

* Chap. vii., vers. 20, 21.

† Chap. xix., vers. 4-8, 21, 22.

I should know the words with which He would answer me,
 And understand what He would say to me :
 Would He contend against me in the greatness of his strength?
 Nay, He would make concessions to me :
 There might the upright reason with Him,
 And once for all I should be acquitted by my Judge.
 Behold, I go towards the East, but He is not there ;
 And Westward, but I cannot perceive Him ;
 Toward the North, where He is working, but I cannot see Him ;
 Where He veileth Himself in the South, but I cannot discern Him.*

* * * * *
 O that I were as in months of old,
 As in the days when God kept me,
 When his lamp shone on my head,
 And by its light I walked through darkness ;
 As I was in my Autumn days,
 When the favour of God was on my tent ;
 When the Almighty was yet with me,
 And my children round about me. †

* * * * *
 I cry to Thee, and Thou answerest me not ;
 I stand up and Thou eyst me :
 Thou art become very cruel to me,
 And dost press me hard with thy strong hand :
 Thou hast caught me up and made me to ride on the blast,
 And caust me to evanish in the crash of the storm.

I know : Thou wilt bring me to death,
 To the house of assembly for all living.
 Prayer is vain when He stretcheth forth his hand,
 When men cry out at calamity.
 Have not I wept with him whose day was hard ?
 Hath not my soul been grieved for the needy ?
 Yet when I waited for good, there came evil,
 And darkness when I looked for light ! ‡

* * * * *
 O that I had One who would hear me !—
 Here is my signature !—that the Almighty would answer me !

* Chap. xxiii., vers. 2-9.

† Chap. xxix., vers. 2-5.

‡ Chap. xxx., vers. 20-26.

That my Adversary would write his indictment !
 Would I not carry it on my shoulder,
 And bind it about me like a chaplet ?
 I would tell Him the very number of my steps,
 I would draw near Him like a prince.*

Can we listen to these bitter sighs of a breaking heart and not feel what it was that was breaking it—that it was the cruel pain of *desertion* ? Are they not but echoes and variations of the most terrible cry that ever broke on the air, “My God, my God, why hast *Thou* forsaken me ?”

And if, now, through the tempest and the darkness, there should sound a Voice from heaven ; if, however it came, the conviction should come to Job that the God he could not find had found him, and was speaking to him, would it matter very much what God said ? Would it not be enough that it was God who was speaking, that the Divine Friend had come back to him, that He had never forgotten him, nor forsaken him ; that He was in the tempest which had swept over him ; that He had listened to him, even when He did not answer Him, and had loved him even when He afflicted him ? It was *this*—O, it was *this*—which dropped like balm into the torn and wounded heart of the sufferer : it was the resurrection of faith and hope and love in the rekindled sense of the Divine Presence and favour that raised him to a life in which doubt and fear had no place, a joy on which even repentance was no stain. Not what God said, but that God spoke to him and had come to him,—it was this which cast him in the dust, which quickened in him that humility which is man's true exaltation, and which constrained from him the happiest words he utters, although they sound so sad : *

* Chap. xxxi., vers. 35-37.

I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,
 But now mine eye hath seen Thee :
 Wherefore I retract, and repent
 In dust and ashes.

And surely, it is this sense of an auspicious Divine Presence, that comes we know not how, before which *all* the darknesses of doubt flee away. It is an experience which lies beyond the scope of language. No man who has passed through it can explain it, or adequately express it in words, since words are incapable of fully rendering any of our deepest emotions. All we can say of it is, that it is not produced by logic, by argument, by answers nicely adapted to the questions we have asked or to the doubts on which we have brooded ; and that, as it did not spring from logic, so neither can it be expressed in logical forms. It is too deep for words to reach, too subtle and spiritual for words to hold.

If a difference has sprung up between two friends long and tenderly attached, are they ever reconciled by mere argument? was it ever known that they *convinced* one another into renewed affection? If the reconciliation comes, it comes from a sense of reviving or unaltered and unalterable love, which lies deep down in the heart beyond the reach of argument. No man could ever say why he loves, or tell what "love" means. "Love laughs at logic"; and if love for man or woman, why not love for God?

3. Still the question recurs, "*What* was it that recovered Job to faith and trust and peace? Was there absolutely *nothing* in what Jehovah said to meet his doubts and answer his questions?"

Well, yes, there was something, though not much. There *is* an argument in the Divine Answer which may be reproduced in logical forms, though it is only an argument of hints and suggestions ; it does not touch the profounder

questions which Job had raised, nor would it be difficult to pick holes in it, if we took it simply as an argument addressed to the inquisitive and sceptical intellect. It does not go very deep. It is addressed to the heart rather than to the brain, to faith rather than to doubt. It would not convince a sceptic, however reasonable and sincere he might be. Nothing would, or can, convince him save that sense of a Divine Presence and Love of which we have just spoken,—and *that* no argument can give.

Nevertheless, let us mark what the Divine Answer was, viewed simply as an argument. Viewed thus, it met that painful sense of mystery which oppressed Job as he sat solitary and alone among his friends, and all the more alone because they were with him. One element in his pain was that he could not tell what God was aiming at, that the Divine Providence was all dark to him, that he could see no reason why a good man should be vexed with loss and misery and a bad man live out all his days in mirth and affluence. And this is a pain we have all felt, of which we should all be gladly rid. The injustice, the inequalities, the pains and degradations which enter into the human lot perplex and afflict us ; we can see no good reason for them : we cannot approve and vindicate them.

Does Jehovah, then, when He answers Job out of the tempest, answer the questions which this spectacle of human misery suggests? Does He assign a good reason, a sufficient motive, for the inequalities of the human lot? He does nothing of the kind. He does not lift an iota of that painful mystery. He simply teaches us that we should not let that mystery pain and perplex us, and hints that it may have a nobler motive and a happier end than we conceive. The argument of the Poem is Butler's argument—the argument from analogy. To the perplexed Patriarch, who sits brooding painfully over the dark problems of life, Jehovah points

out that equally insoluble mysteries are over his head and under his feet ; that he lives and moves and has his being amid them ; that, look where he will, he cannot escape them : and that, as he finds them everywhere else, he should expect to find them in human life. Briefly put, taking only the argument which underlies its sublime poetry, the Divine Answer runs thus :—“ You fret and despair over the one mystery which has been brought home to you by the pangs of sorrow and loss ; you are perturbed because you cannot interpret it. But, see, there are mysteries everywhere ; the whole universe is thick with them :—can you interpret these ? Can you explain the creation of the world, the separation of land and sea, and the interwoven influences of the one on the other ? Have you mastered all the secrets of light and darkness, of wind and rain, of snow and ice, of the migrations of birds, of the structure and instincts of the beasts ? Yet, instead of fretting over *these* mysteries, you accept and profit by them ; you *use* sea and land, day and night, wind and rain, birds and beasts, and make them serve your turn. You live, content, amid a thousand other problems you cannot solve, and turn them to account. Should you not look, then, to find mysteries in the creature whom I have set over all other works of my hand—in man, and in his lot ? Will it not be wise of you to use your life rather than to brood over it, to turn your lot, with all its changes, to good account, rather than to fret over the problems it suggests ? ”

Another argument may be hinted at in the Divine Answer. In his sublime description of the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, Jehovah may have meant to suggest to Job : “ Consider these mysteries and parables of Nature, and what they reveal of the end and purpose of Him by whom they were created. You cannot adequately interpret any one of them, but you see that they all work together for

good. You cannot tell how the world was made, how the firm earth and flowing seas were formed ; but the earth yields you her fruits, and the sea carries your ships and brings you the wealth of distant lands. You cannot command the wind, or the clouds that bring rain ; but you can see that the winds carry health and the rains fertility wherever they go. You cannot explain the migration of the birds that travel all the year, but you can see that God feeds and fosters them by the instinct which drives them from shore to shore. The world around you is full of mysteries which you cannot solve ; but, so far as you can judge, is not their end a beneficent end ? And if the world within you also has mysteries which you cannot fathom, cannot you trust that, somehow, here or hereafter, these too will reach a final goal of good ? The mystery of life, the mystery of pain,—may not these be as beneficent as you admit the marvels and mysteries of Nature to be ?”

This is the argument of the Divine Answer, so far as it has an argument ; and even this is suggested rather than stated. And, as we have admitted, it does not go very deep. It does not solve the problems over which we brood ; it only points us to other problems equally difficult, equally insoluble. It does not affirm even, it only hints, that the end of all these mysteries may be a good end, an end of mercy and grace. There is enough for faith to think over and to rest upon, but there is no clear satisfying answer for doubt ; there is enough to nourish the heart, but not enough to convince the intellect and stop the mouth of gainsayers. We are not told—much as we long to know it—why God permits evil to exist, or why He permits it to take so many painful and apparently injurious forms for the righteous. We are simply invited to trust in the God whom we have found to be good, and to believe that out of evil itself He will educe a greater good. God does not argue with us,

nor seek to force our trust ; for trust and love are not to be forced, but won. You cannot force even your own child to love and confide in you. All you can do is to surround him with a large pure atmosphere of kindness, to shew him that you are worthy of his confidence and affection. When you have done your best and utmost, he may abuse your confidence and repay your kindness with a thoughtless ingratitude. It may be necessary that he should go out into the world, and discover its coldness, its selfishness, its indifference, before he can learn to value your tenderness and repay your love with love. And it is thus with us and God. He is good, and gentle, and kind. But we are wilful, careless, ungrateful. In his wisdom and kindness He sends us out to contend against the adversities of life ; He permits us to serve the sinful passions we love more than we love Him, that we may find how cruel and degrading a bondage their service is. The "tempest" sweeps through our darkened heaven, through our darkened hearts, strewing them with wrecks : and *now*, if the kind, tender Voice speak to us out of the tempest with an unalterable affection, if the conviction come to us that God is our Father and loves us, our love springs to meet the love of our Father in heaven ; we wait for no arguments, we ask no proofs ; it is enough that our Father speaks to us once more, that He loves us still, that He rejoices over us as we bow in penitence and renewed affection before Him. Not by logical arguments which convince our reason, but by tender appeals which touch and break our hearts, our Father conquers us at last, and wins our trust and love for ever.

V.

The Atonement.

IF, as we believe, Christ is both God and the Son of God; if, moreover, He is man as well as God, and if this Son of God and Man has made a sacrifice in virtue of which the sin of the whole world is taken away,—then, surely, the Atonement effected by this mysterious Person must itself be a mystery the full import of which we cannot hope to fathom. No man, however wise, or learned, or devout, should affect to comprehend it; no man, whatever his attainments, should venture to speak of it, save with modesty and reverence, and with a profound conviction that he knows it “but in part,” that he sees it but as “through a glass, darkly.”

If any man object, “But why speak at all of so incomprehensible a mystery?” or, “How can you expect me to believe what I cannot understand?” the reply is obvious. Faith begins where knowledge ends; and knowledge soon ends, so soon that no man ever did live, no man can live, without faith. What we see and understand, that we know. Faith is that quality, or power, by which we apprehend and receive the things which are not seen, by which we venture out into the invisible and incomprehensible, assured that even there we shall find a solid path beneath our feet and a friendly Heaven above our heads. “Mysteries” are the proper objects of faith. We walk by faith only where we cannot walk by sight. And, at the best, our knowledge is

but a little island floating on, and amid, an infinite sea of mystery. Every natural phenomenon, every fact of experience, runs up, as we pursue it, into those great laws of Nature and Life whose modes of action we may be able to formulate, but of the essence of which we are wholly and hopelessly ignorant. Every rock, flower, tree, star, and much more every man, is but a manifestation in time, to sense, of those natural and vital laws which, in themselves, are an unsolved and insoluble mystery even to the wisest of our race. Were we to speak only of that which in the full sense we *know*, we should never open our lips; for we know nothing fully: all our knowledge is but in part. We cannot follow any track of inquiry more than a few steps without reaching the farthest shore of our knowledge and launching out on that great deep of mystery which belts it round.

We know all things phenomenally, not really; not as they are in themselves, but as they are manifested to us under the conditions of time and sense: and, always, our knowledge is bounded by mysteries at which we speedily arrive, and in which we are lost, unless indeed we are prepared to believe what we cannot see and define and formulate.

Now we may speak of the Atonement on precisely the same terms on which we may speak of any other topic which engages our thoughts. That is to say, we may take this great spiritual fact, or transaction, to have been proved by appropriate evidence; we may say that this or that aspect of it has been manifested, or revealed, to us: and we must confess that, beyond and beneath all the aspects of it which we are able to grasp, there stretches an illimitable sea of mystery in which our thoughts are drowned, unless, indeed, they be inspired and upheld by faith; for even on *this* sea of mystery, as of old on the darkened and wind-vexed sea of Galilee, He walks who can give us grace to walk with Him, if only we are not doubtful but believing.

And just now, when a single aspect of the Atonement is being earnestly pressed home on the thoughts of men as though it were a complete and satisfactory account of that great mystery of godliness, when the doctrine of the Cross is being robbed of much of its truth by being stripped of all its mystery, it is very necessary that we should speak about it, and frame for ourselves the widest conceptions of it that we can. Any man who will speak frankly and modestly of what he himself has learned of it, and of the shape it has taken in his thoughts, may help to clear and enlarge the thoughts of his neighbours, whatever the point of view from which he approaches it.

Accordingly I venture to offer, as my contribution to the general stock of thought on this theme, a brief summary of the leading aspects of the Atonement revealed in the New Testament Scriptures, although I can only speak as a student and expositor of the Word, not as a scientific theologian. All I can do, all I wish and shall attempt to do in this paper, is to state in a simple and popular way those views of it to which I have been led by a careful study of Holy Writ, and which, as they have been helpful to my own faith, may, I trust, prove helpful to that of others.

But though I must needs speak as an expositor rather than as a theologian, I am not about to cite and discuss texts : for it is this habit of relying on scattered and isolated passages of Scripture, and on the letter of them rather than on the animating spirit, which has given rise to most of the errors and divisions of the Church. The letter killeth ; it is the spirit of Scripture which gives life to thought, as well as to souls. And it is to the animating and pervading spirit of the New Testament that I shall appeal. I am not thus evading a difficulty ; I am, rather, creating one for myself. Proof passages might easily be quoted in abundance for

every position I am about to maintain ; but I do not intend to rely on these, but on certain large and general trains of thought which I feel sure no reader of the New Testament, whatever his theological prepossessions, can have failed to discover in it.

In the New Testament, then, I find three leading aspects of the Atonement wrought by Christ set forth,—not simply favoured by this passage or that, but interwoven with the very substance and whole extent of the Revelation it contains. These three aspects I may call, for want of simpler and happier terms, (1) the *Metaphysical*, (2) the *Apocalyptic*, and (3) the *Ethical*.*

1. The *Metaphysical* View, or Aspect, of the Atonement. Beyond all question there is a large number of passages in the New Testament which speak of the Sacrifice of Christ as a ransom which He paid to deliver us from the captivities of evil ; as a propitiation which He offered to a justly-offended God for the sin, or the sins, of the world : as a satisfaction which he rendered to the law of God, in virtue of which God can remain just while yet He justifies the ungodly. I do not cite these passages. There is no need. I affirm, without any fear of contradiction, that no man who

* There is indeed a fourth aspect of this great mystery of godliness set forth in the New Testament, mainly in the writings of St. Paul : the *philosophical* aspect we might term it. It rests on the *solidarité* of the man Christ Jesus and the human race, a *solidarité* so perfect, it would seem, that it may not only be said that what He did He did for us all, but also that what He did *we* did in Him. I recognize the immense value of this view of the Atonement, and anticipate that, when once it has been mastered, it will prove to be the ruling and largest view. But I doubt whether any man has mastered it yet, or so mastered it as to be capable of formulating it in any language that would be “understood of the people.” I at least have not so mastered it, and cannot therefore complete my Essay by including it.

has read the New Testament carefully and candidly, has failed to find this view of the Atonement in it. It takes many forms ; it at once hides and discloses itself under many figures of speech ; it gives shape and substance to many passages and arguments, especially in the writings of St. Paul : but, above and beside all this, there is a *spirit* pervading the whole Christian Revelation which points steadfastly in this direction, and which no reader of spiritual discernment can possibly miss.

So far from having been missed, it is *this* aspect of the Atonement which the popular theology is apt to insist on as the only aspect, as containing in itself the whole doctrine of the Cross. Men are constantly invited and urged to trust in the propitiation offered to God once for all by Christ ; and assured that, if they do unfeignedly and heartily trust in it, their sins will be forgiven them, and they will be reconciled or atoned to God.

Now I am very far from denying, or even questioning, this aspect of the Atonement. On the contrary, I heartily affirm it. I acknowledge that it is taught in the Scriptures of the New Testament, taught more frequently even and in more varied forms than any other, and that it is therefore to be believed by all who accept Christ for their Teacher and Lord, even although they do not comprehend it. But I submit that it is not the only aspect of the doctrine, nor an aspect of it which, if it stand alone, can be urged on the faith and consciences of men without peril. It is the heavenward, not the earthward, aspect of the Atonement ; the side it turns to God, not the side it turns to man. It is a question of Divine metaphysics. It affects the inter-relations of the Father and the Son. It asserts that the Father, in or by the Son, did that in virtue of which He may justly forgive our offences against Him and his law. It implies—and the implication perplexes and baffles human reason—that,

apart from the Sacrifice of the Cross, even the Love of God could not have gained access to us, that our sins could not have been forgiven. In short, it is a great mystery; or, rather, it is a series of great mysteries which we cannot hope to fathom.

Glimpses into this mystery may be permitted us, nevertheless, and glimpses which reach, for aught that I can tell, to its very centre and heart. We may say, for example, that only as a satisfaction was rendered to the Divine Law which we had broken could that Law be vindicated and established in the respect of men. Or we may say that, in and through Christ, we are taught that obedience to that Law, even though it leads through suffering and death, is the only path to peace and blessedness, and that thus the law of God is not only vindicated, but glorified. Or we may say that since He, who might justly have inflicted on us the penalties due to sin, Himself endured them on our behalf, the revelation of the eternal righteousness of God was even more emphatic than it would have been had these penalties been exacted of those who had incurred them. Or, again, we may say that, as all men had sinned, it was necessary that He in whom all men are and live—the archetypal all-comprehending Man—should obey for them all, that so, by the obedience of the One, the many disobedient might be made righteous. In many ways we may try to lessen the burden and pressure of this great mystery. But the more we brood over it, and the wiser we grow, and the clearer the light that falls on it, the more humbly do we confess that it is dark with excess of light, that it is so high we cannot attain to it, so wide that we cannot grasp it. All our endeavours do but land us in the conclusion, that we cannot hope to comprehend the relations which obtain among the Sacred Persons of the Blessed Trinity, or how those relations were modified if indeed they were modified, by the incarnation and death

of Christ. We can only say, "The New Testament, which teaches us all that we know of the Saviour, affirms that it is in virtue of his death that God can forgive and justify the ungodly; and therefore we believe it, and urge our neighbours to believe it."

That, in this aspect of it, the Atonement is a great mystery, an "unsearchable operation," must be admitted, if for no other reason, yet for this,—that during the last eighteen centuries at least three radically different theories of it have successively prevailed in the Church. But it would be none the less a mystery—rather, our reason at well as our faith would be still more severely tried, were this aspect of it not revealed. For there is a sense of justice in us which demands that the violated law of God should be vindicated, that his rectitude should be displayed as well as his love, that forgiveness should not be a mere act of grace wholly dissociated from the claims of righteousness. And in the Scriptures of the New Testament we are made to feel that this sense of justice is met and satisfied, though we cannot tell exactly how, by the fact that He died for our sins in whom we all died (2 Cor. v. 14), and rose again from the dead that we all might live in Him. Were it not in any way met, the mystery of the Atonement would only be a still more inscrutable mystery.

Nor, on the other hand, because we cannot solve the mystery which underlies the Atonement, are we at all warranted in refusing to believe in that great Act. We cannot understand how two natures, the physical and the spiritual, can inhere in one person, or how the one is affected by the activity of the other; but we do not therefore refuse to believe that man has both a spiritual and a physical nature, and that each of these is affected in many subtle and intimate ways by its associate. Still less do we

understand how there should be "three persons" in one God, and how the manifestation of God to the world in one of these Persons should affect their relations to each other and to men: but if there be an infinite God above us, how should we who are finite, and who touch unfathomable mysteries at every step, expect to comprehend Him and his ways? A God whom we *could* comprehend would be no God to us: He would be altogether such an one as ourselves.

2. But even faith must have something—something intelligible—to grasp. The great mysterious laws of Nature manifest themselves in phenomena which we can study and apprehend; it is as we study natural phenomena that we become aware of the laws and mysteries—mechanical, chemical, vital—which lie behind them. And, in like manner, the laws and mysteries of the spiritual world must have their phenomena, their intelligible outlines and aspects, on which our thoughts may fasten. Can we not find in the New Testament, then, other, and more intelligible, and more practical aspects of the Atonement than that at which we have just glanced? Assuredly we may. For in these Scriptures we find, what, for want of a simpler word, I have called the *Apocalyptic* view of it.

Now an "apocalypse" is an uncovering, an unveiling, of that which was before hidden and unseen. The Apocalypse of St. John is an uncovering, or unveiling, of the secrets of the heavenly, or spiritual, world. And the death of the Cross is an apocalypse, an unveiling, an uncovering, of the eternal love of God for men. Men, as we may see from the religions which preceded that of Christ, had come to doubt and distrust, if not to deny, that God loved them. They conceived of Him as an offended and austere Being, who needed to be placated or atoned by gifts and sacrifices

before He would be gracious to them.* Christ came to convince them that they had misconceived the Father ; to teach them that God would *make* the Atonement they had supposed Him to demand : to assure them that He had never ceased to love them, and that his love was of a quality which would bear wrong, distrust, enmity, death, and yet not loosen its hold. In short, He unveiled the hidden love of God ; He shewed how far it would go, how much it would do and bear, in order that men might be redeemed from the miserable captivity of Sin, that they might be reconciled and restored to Him.

Here, again, I quote no texts ; for here again there is no need. No one who has read the New Testament with any care will fail to recall many passages which speak of the Sacrifice of Christ as a manifestation of the love of God, as a proof that He so loved the world, even when it was at enmity against Him, that, to redeem the world, He spared not his only Son, but freely gave Him up for us all. No such reader but will frankly admit that this thought pervades it from end to end, and is affirmed, not by the letter only, but by the spirit of Scripture. †

* So far, therefore, is the "metaphysical" conception of the Atonement from being, as is sometimes alleged, alien or opposed to the natural reason of man, that men, when they had no Revelation to guide and instruct their thoughts, universally conceived of God as demanding precisely such an Atonement as this.

† Of course it is not only the *love* of God that is revealed in the death of Christ. That death, as has already been admitted, in a mysterious yet effective way, reveals and vindicates the *righteousness* of God. And, no doubt, the completest mode of speaking of it would be to affirm that it reveals the entire nature, or character, of God. All I want to mark here is, that the New Testament does, constantly and with emphasis, affirm the death of Christ to be a manifestation, and the supreme manifestation, of the love of God (as, *e.g.*, if texts *must* be cited, in the familiar passages, St. John iii. 16 ; Romans v. 8 ; 1 John iii. 16 ; and iv. 9, 10).

Very well, then. Here is an intelligible aspect of the Atonement, one that soon runs up into mystery indeed if we pursue it, but, none the less, one that we can clearly apprehend, and the power of which we feel. We know what love is ; we can conceive what the love of God must be like now that it has been revealed in Christ—how pure it must be, how strong and how enduring. And as this second aspect of the Atonement is more intelligible than the first, so is it also the more practical of the two, the more influential on the hearts and lives of men. Tell them only that Christ has made a sacrifice which, in some mysterious way, justifies God in forgiving their sins, and you may give them an instant and wonderful sense of relief, since if they believe that He who must otherwise have inflicted the penalties due to their sins Himself endured them on their behalf, they may well believe also that their sins are forgiven them : but however carefully you guard your doctrine, they are well-nigh sure to misconceive and abuse it, as indeed they have done in the past,—assuming that if they only believed that Christ made such a sacrifice, they needed to do no more : the guilt of their sins would be taken away, although their lives were not lifted out of the slough of sin and made clean and pure. But add this second aspect to the first ; when you have told them that, for Christ's sake, God both can and will forgive them, tell them also that God gave his only and beloved Son to die for them in order to shew how much He loved them, how utterly willing He is to forgive and receive and bless them, and so soon as they feel the power and sweetness of this Divine love, their hearts spring up, and must needs spring up, to greet it with a responsive love, a love which, as we shall soon see, cleanses and uplifts their whole nature.

But before we pass on to the ethical aspect of the Atonement, I wish to emphasize a point too often overlooked :

viz., that even the Sacrifice of Christ was but a temporal, though it is also the supreme, manifestation to men of a Love that *always* exists, and is always prepared, should need arise, to go as far and to do as much as when the Son of Man poured out his soul unto death. We are often told that in no age, and in no world, will the Sacrifice of Christ be repeated. And, possibly, that is true. It may be that the sacrifice of Christ is a solitary act, which will never need to be repeated in any form, the effects of which extend, and for ever will extend, throughout the universe. No similar manifestation of the Divine Love may be requisite at any period or in any sphere of being. But this, we should remember, is only a speculation, or, at best, a doubtful inference from ambiguous words. And the glorious fact is, that the Love which once manifested itself on the Cross still exists, and will for ever exist, and will, we may be sure, be manifested again and again, as the need for its manifestation recurs and varies. Notwithstanding our constant assertion of the eternity of God, we too much forget that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; that what we see to be in Him at any single moment we may know to be in Him at every moment and for ever. That a Love capable of the utmost self-sacrifice was in Him once we learn from the Cross; and therefore we may be very sure that that very Love—Love as pure, as deep, as self-sacrificing—must in all ways and at all times be seeking to manifest itself to his creatures.

3. But even this second aspect of the Atonement is not without its dangers. Those who think of the Sacrifice of the Cross only as a manifestation of the Love of God may only too easily come to rely on that Love without responding to it, or may respond to it only with a weak sentiment which does not purify and ennoble their lives. Indeed, the

world has long sneered at the Church, or at certain members of the Church, as holding a creed which either persuades them that they may be relieved from the punishment of sin without being redeemed from sin itself, or which quickens in them a weak puling sentiment incapable of producing in them the elements of a righteous and manly character. And, therefore, to the Metaphysical and the Apocalyptical, we must be careful to add the *Ethical* aspect of the Atonement.

Now this third aspect springs logically and naturally from the second. For when we once apprehend the love of God for us, a responsive love is kindled in us. And this love, if at least it be a true response, if, that is, it be like the love from which it springs, cannot be a mere sentiment easily divorced from righteousness; for in God love and righteousness are one: nay, according to the New Testament, love includes righteousness both in God and in man. "Love," we are told, "is the end of the Commandment," that to secure which it was given, and in which it rests. And, again, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." And, again, "To love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourself" is the whole duty, the whole righteousness, of man. So that the love inspired in us by the great revelation of the love of God is a strong and active affection, which cannot fail to draw us into conformity with the righteous will of God.

And that the quickening of this love within us is the proper effect of faith in the Atonement, I need not cite texts to prove. They are to be found on every page of the New Testament, and notably in that large and ill-understood class of passages which speaks of the blood of Christ as of a virtue to cleanse us from all sin. To many it would seem, from the kind of language they employ, that this cleansing virtue shapes itself as a chemical and detergent constituent of the mere blood shed upon the Tree! Others appear to

assign this efficacy to the mere pain endured for men by the Son of Man—assuming what surely needs to be proved, that that which is physical is capable of being converted into moral equivalents, that mere bodily pain may become a spiritual power. Others virtually reduce the Sacrifice of Christ to the level of the sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic economy, and imply that its virtue has an arbitrary source in a Divine ordinance,—forgetting that even the old Testament pours contempt on all sacrifices save those of the will and the heart, save those which are personal, inward, spiritual. And, indeed, most persons of any refinement have so shrunk from the conventional and traditional uses of the phraseology which connects the redemption from sin with “*the blood* of Christ,” that probably very few of them have paused to consider what the New Testament use of it means and implies.

It must be confessed that the metaphor of the phrase, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,” like many other metaphors in the New Testament, is a broken and imperfect one,—the Apostles caring much more for exact expressions or comprehensive summaries of truth than to make a figure run on all fours, or to secure artistic beauty of style. To sprinkle, or wash, or plunge a man in blood is not the way to make him clean, but the way to make him foul. But, in the mind of the Apostles, the “blood” stood for the death, for the sacrifice, of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ was the supreme and consummate expression of the love of God for men. That love, when apprehended by faith, kindled a corresponding love in them. When once this responsive affection was kindled in them, it drew them away from the sins by which they had offended God, and drew them toward the righteousness by which alone they could please Him. To the Apostles’ minds, as any man who will *study* the Epistles of St. Paul and St.

John may see for himself, the phrase, "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin," was a brief summary of this comprehensive series of truths:—the sacrifice of Christ was a manifestation of the love of God; that love kindled a love like itself in those who believed in it; and this love, again, broke the power, and healed the wounds, and washed away the stains of sin.*

Rightly viewed, therefore, there is nothing in this doctrine to favour the thought of Salvation apart from Righteousness. Rather, the Atonement of Christ is, according to the Scriptures, a revelation of the love of the righteous God designed to kindle the love and service of Righteousness in sinful men; it only produces its due effect on us when it "delivers us from this present evil world," since He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live unto righteousness." In fine, to be cleansed from all sin, to be made righteous by love for the loving and righteous

* No doubt, in the mind of *Jewish* writers, this phrase, "the blood of Christ," etc., would contain an allusion to the legal cleansing, or acquittal, effected by the sacrifices offered in the Temple,—which sacrifices, be it remembered however, had no moral worth save as they were accompanied by repentance, faith, and the purpose of amendment and a yearning for the Divine love and help. I admit, too, that this allusion would be very prominent in the minds of the Apostles when they penned this phrase. All I contend for is that there is sufficient evidence in their Writings to shew, that when they endeavoured to get at the moral equivalents of that legal cleansing, to frame a conception of the way in which consciences defiled by sin and characters degraded by it were cleansed and raised, they pursued the line of thought indicated above. But even should this interpretation of the phrase be contested, the general argument in favour of an *ethical* aspect of the Atonement would remain untouched, since no theologian of any mark denies that the objective Atonement only reaches its end as it produces a subjective Atonement in us, we being made "partakers of Christ's death" and of his life,—the death to sins and the life of righteousness (see 2 Cor. v. 15, 17-21; Gal. i. 4; 1 Peter ii. 20-24).

will of God,—this, and nothing short of this, is the salvation offered to us in “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”

Now I am very far from saying that these three aspects of the Atonement—metaphysical, apocalyptical, ethical—embrace and exhaust *all* that the New Testament has to teach on this great and mysterious theme ; doubtless there are other aspects of it which will yet reward the labour of those who dig in this sacred mine : but I submit that no view of the Atonement can possibly be regarded as complete which does not include at least these three aspects of it, since they are all clearly and obviously revealed in Holy Writ. And, further, I venture to ask all who teach and preach to consider which of these views needs just now to be urged the more earnestly and emphatically on the attention of the Church and the World? That it *is* necessary, now and always, to affirm that Christ offered Himself as a propitiation, in virtue of which God can forgive the sins of men without any departure from justice, without putting any slight on his violated law, I profoundly feel and frankly admit : wherefore else is the truth so clearly and constantly affirmed in the New Testament? But in affirming and teaching this truth, we should be careful to speak with modesty and reverence, confessing how little we know of the mystery which underlies it. No man, however good or wise or erudite, should affect to comprehend it, to map out with accurate precision the several provinces of it occupied respectively by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; or imply that he has been admitted to the councils of the Sacred Trinity, and can tell exactly what effect the sacrifice of the Son produced on the mind of the Father, and in what way the death of the One gives life, or the prospect of life, to all. There is grave danger, if this aspect of the Atonement be insisted on solely or even unduly, that men will

come to think of the Atonement as a mere legal transaction, which has no necessary or vital bearing on character, as obtaining for them a mere verdict of acquittal at the Divine Bar, instead of thinking of it as redeeming them from the tyranny and usurpation of sin.

On the other hand, if we go to men conscious of sin and longing to be delivered from it, and tell them that God so loved them that He can give Himself no rest till He has delivered them from the grasp of sin and made them righteous even as He Himself is righteous, and that He has given them full proof and assurance of this Divine redeeming Love in that He both gave his Son to suffer with and for them, and is ever seeking by his Spirit to make them like his Son :—are we not likely to address ourselves to the very sense of need of which they are conscious, and win them to meet the Love of God with a love that shall constrain them to hate the sins which have alienated them from Him, and to practise themselves in the obedience which will bring them near to Him ?

In the difficult and perplexing conditions under which we live, longing for gratifications and indulgences not to be procured without sin, and yet hating the misery and degradation which sin involves ; shrinking from the effort requisite to doing that which is right, and yet conscious that right-doing is the only way to peace and blessedness, there is surely no Gospel so welcome, none so happily adjusted to our conditions, as that which assures us that the very God against whom we have sinned loves us, and in his love will help us to hate sin itself, and not only the misery and degradation it brings with it,—help us also to take and keep that path of righteousness in which alone we can find rest and peace. No thoughtful and noble-minded man can be content with mere exemption from the punishment he has deserved ; much less can he be content to transfer that

punishment to another who has not deserved it. What he wants, what we all want, even though as yet we know it not, is such a forgiveness of sins as shall really cleanse us from our sins and fix and establish us in the love and service of holiness. And this *is* the Gospel which, by the grace of God, is preached to us, and to all men, in the life and death of his Son.

VI.

Capacity involves Responsibility.

ST. MATTHEW XI. 15.

IT is sometimes said of men of great fertility of mind, or even of great singularity of mind, that they never repeat themselves, never say the same thing twice; or, at least, never say the same thing twice in the same words. And when men say this of any teacher who speaks often and much, they intend it for a compliment, and even for one of the very greatest compliments they can pay him. But is this, after all, the best thing that can be said of a great teacher, or even one of the best? Is it characteristic of those who have spoken on moral or religious themes most wisely and with the most impassioned earnestness? On the contrary, when men are possessed by any great truth, or series of truths, they are for ever harping on them, for ever repeating them,—repeating them in new forms, no doubt, in new connections, with new illustrations, but yet often falling back on forms of thought and modes of expression which they have used before. It is, indeed, by iterating and reiterating the truths which they hold to be of prime importance that they succeed in impressing them on the public mind, and win consideration for them, if not acceptance. In how many forms, for example, and yet how often in the same forms, does Carlyle preach the sacredness of labour,

bid men do the duty that lies nearest to them, and assure them that "blessedness," not "happiness," is their being's end and aim! St. Paul, again, constantly insisted on what he held to be the cardinal truths of the Christian system, often repeating both his theological arguments and his moral injunctions in similar, or identical, words. Now, assuredly, St. Paul did not repeat himself out of indolence, or because of the poverty of his intellect, or because he did not love to push out the lines of thought beyond the limits to which he had already carried them. No man, I suppose, ever had a more ardent and audacious, a more fertile and original, mind, or better loved to use it to the full stretch of its powers. It may be conjectured with much probability, indeed, that he never shewed a more genuine and difficult courtesy than when he said to the Philippians, "To write the same things to you to me *is not grievous*, and for you it is safe." But for his kindly consideration for their weakness and need, I apprehend he would have found it very "grievous" to go on saying "the same things" to them time after time. It was only because he cared more to make them "safe" than to indulge his own bent, that he was willing to repeat the same things over and over again.

But, more, the very highest example of all is on the side of repetition. Of the Lord Jesus Himself it would be impossible to say, what is often said as a compliment of inferior teachers, that He never said the same thing again in the same words. That He repeated Himself, in the sense of iterating and reiterating certain great truths in ever new and varied forms, every one will admit. Such truths as that we ought to trust in the Providence of God and not to fret ourselves about to-morrow, or that "the love of God is more than all our sins," or that faith is the only avenue by which we can reach and appropriate spiritual realities, were of the very staple of his ministry,

and recur again and again—in prayer, in parable, in conversation, in set discourse. But, beyond this, He not infrequently fell back on the very words He had used before. Certain phrases grew to be habitual with Him. He repeated them again and again. And these phrases are more numerous than is commonly imagined. It is no part of my present purpose to trace many of them through the several occasions on which they were used. Some of them will be familiar to every student of the Word, as, for instance, these and such as these:—"There are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first;" "The servant is not greater than his master;" "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life shall save it;" and, again, "He that will be greatest among you, let him serve." For the present let us be content with tracing out the history and meaning of a less familiar and, apparently, a far less important and significant repetition.

"*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,*" is said to have been a formula in common use among the Jews; and, certainly, it sounds like one of the dark Rabbinical sayings, seeming to mean little, yet intended to convey much. But whether He took it from the Rabbis, or whether He gave it to them, unquestionably our Lord repeated it many times. It was first used by Him when He assured his disciples that the whole prophecy of the coming of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord had been fulfilled in the advent and ministry of John the Baptist.* He used it again as He closed his first great parable, that of the Sower who went forth to sow.† He used it once more when He had been speaking of the salt wherewith every one must be salted, and asked, "But if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith

* St. Matthew xi. 10-15.

† St. Matthew xiii. 9; St. Mark iv. 9; St. Luke viii. 8

shall it be seasoned?"* Even these three instances would suffice to shew that in these words we have a phrase which commended itself to our Lord, which He used again and again, repeating it probably on many occasions of which we have no record. But what is very curious, and shews how habitually this phrase was on his lips, is the singular fact that He uses it when He speaks from heaven as well as when He stood on the earth. After his ascension into heaven He sent seven Epistles, by his servant John, to the seven Churches of Asia, in which He at once commended and reprovèd them; and each of these seven Epistles closes with words which are virtually a repetition of the phrase we have already found in the Gospels.† No less than seven times we read, "*He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" Ten times in all, then, this phrase occurs in the brief limits of the New Testament; and always as from the lips of Christ.

Now, obviously, it is much to be desired that we should have a clear conception of the significance of a phrase so often repeated in a Book in which space is so valuable. Obviously, too, it is reasonable to expect that a phrase so often repeated, and repeated by the Great Teacher, will have a special worth. Nor is it unreasonable, I think, to assume that it will have a special worth *in itself*, and not simply as calling studious attention to other sayings of great value and importance. No doubt it subserves *that* function; it does call special attention to the sayings which precede it, and imply that these sayings have an exceptional value. It *was* a great fact, a fact, too, which many doubted or disputed, that the ancient prophecy of the coming of Elijah had been fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist; for, as Elijah was to come in order to prepare

* St. Luke xiv. 35.

† Revelation ii. 7, 11, 17, 29; and iii. 6, 13, 22.

the way of the Lord, this fact implied that the Lord Himself was now among men : and, therefore, when He said, "If ye will receive it, this is Elijah who was to come," Christ might well call attention to these pregnant and momentous words by adding, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" So, again, the parable of the Sower, plain as its meaning may be to us, was felt to be very difficult by the disciples ; they were conscious of a spiritual meaning in it which their undisciplined endeavours failed to grasp, and had to ask their Master to "declare" it to them : and, therefore, because He knew the parable was hard for them to understand, while yet it much imported them to understand it, He might well call their special attention to it by his closing words, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" So, once more, when He likened his doctrine to salt, and hinted that if we hold the truth in unrighteousness, we may corrupt the very salt of life, He uttered a parable the full meaning of which probably no man has grasped even yet, and might well call our attention to words so "dark with excess of light" by adding, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" So, finally, the Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia contained matter of the gravest importance at least to those Churches, and involve truths which we all find it difficult to discover and appropriate : and, therefore, our Lord might well call *their* special attention to them, and *ours*, by appending to them the words, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"

We *may* regard this phrase, then, as a mark of emphasis, as summoning studious attention to words of special moment or difficulty. In some old English books passages of singular importance or beauty are indicated by the figure of a hand stamped on the margin of the page on which they are printed ; and we may perhaps take this phrase as intended to fulfil a similar function in the pages of the New Testa-

ment. It is a like hand in the margin, pointing to passages which we must on no account pass by. But even in a mere mark of emphasis, if at least it be used by Christ, we should look for some intrinsic beauty and worth. And though we admit the profound significance, or even the exceptional worth, of the passages to which this phrase calls our thoughts, we can hardly be content with the conclusion that it has no other function or worth than that of calling our attention to them. A phrase so often repeated by the Great Teacher, so habitual to his lips, must, one should think, have a value, and a special value, of its own. What is its value, then? What does it mean, or imply? What general, important, and helpful truth does it convey,—what such truth as we naturally expect to find in words habitual to our Saviour's lips?

The truth I find in it is this,—*that capacity involves responsibility, spiritual capacity spiritual responsibility.* What a man can do, that he ought to do. If he *can* hear, *let* him hear; yes, and if he can see, let him see; if he can serve, let him serve; if he can pray, let him pray; or, as St. Paul expresses the same truth, “Having these gifts (*χαρίσματα*) differing according to the grace (*τὴν χάριν*) that is bestowed upon us, if it be prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of the faith, or if serving, let us be diligent in our serving; or he that teacheth, in his teaching; or he that exhorteth, in his exhortation; he that giveth, let him give with simplicity; he that ruleth, let him rule with earnestness; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”* By his habitual use of this phrase our Lord exhorts men to a diligent and faithful employment of their spiritual faculties, powers, opportunities, gifts;—so, at least, I interpret his use of it.

And if this be its true meaning, is it not a worthy mean-

* Romans xiii. 6-8.

ing—a meaning congruous and appropriate to the lips that uttered it? What was our Lord's very mission on earth? for *what* was He sent but to awaken men to a sense of their spiritual subjection, and to call them to a resolute use of their powers and his gifts, that they might thus rise into spiritual life and vigour and freedom? If, then, we have hit on the true meaning of this phrase, we must confess that it is a worthy meaning; we shall no longer wonder that it so often fell from his gracious lips who came to lift men to the full use and the full enjoyment of their spiritual capacities and powers.

But *is* this its true meaning? Let us examine the phrase and see.

When we first look at it, it seems a mere truism, so simple and trite does it appear. "If a man can hear, let him hear!" we say: "Why, of course men can hear, nay, must hear, whatever is spoken audibly to them." But no sooner do we begin to think, than we see that *that* is not true, that it is not true even on the lowest plane of experience. On the contrary, it is quite true that men *can* hear much that they do not hear. An average ear, we are told, is able to recognize about a thousand musical tones. Speaking roughly, the human ear is so constructed that all tones, from that which is caused by fifty vibrations in a second to that which is caused by five thousand vibrations in a second, can be distinctly received and discriminated. It is a wide range; but both above it and below it there are sounds inaudible to us, though very probably many of them are audible to some of "the inferior creatures." We stand, in short, amidst a vast complexity of sounds, many of which we are incapable of receiving, many more of which only the trained ear can receive (it is computed, for instance, that in the compass of a single octave a trained violinist can distinguish four times as many distinct tones as his untrained

neighbours): and even of those sounds which we can all hear, we miss many for want of attention, while we miss the full significance of many more for want of knowledge. How much we lose, for example, in walking through a wood, if we are ignorant of the notes of the various birds we hear around us; how much the scene gains in interest and charm when we have learned to recognize them and call up a picture of the birds in their several haunts. Nay, how many more distinct tones we hear in the sweet general babble of the woods if we are able to recognize the several notes of which it is composed. If it be true that "the eye sees only what it brings the power of seeing," it is equally true that the ear hears only what it brings the power of hearing. The capacity of hearing is a common gift; but this common gift becomes special and valuable to us in proportion as we exercise and cultivate it. We all have ears; but we have not all of us ears to hear this or that with: and, even if we have, we do not always use them.

Let us take still another illustration—rising a little in the scale. If we listen to the music of any great master, such as Mendelssohn or Weber, Beethoven or Bach, we may not all of us be really charmed or impressed by it; the music may be too severe in form, too classical, for our untrained taste, although, in deference to the fashion of the time, we may be tempted to say, and even to think, that we like it. If we do honestly like it, if we are charmed by the veins of melody we find in it, and impressed by a dim sense of a poetic meaning and grandeur in it, yet how different are the sensations of an accomplished and scientific musician as *he* listens to it and sees the master's plan unfold before him, as he traces out the sequence of thought and emotion in it, and responds to a thousand touches of beauty which, in our ignorance, we wholly pass by.

Consider still another illustration. If we listen to a

sermon from a preacher who has a profound acquaintance with Holy Writ, who is also familiar with the best literature of his age, and whose heart glows with a fervent love for God and man, we all hear the same words, and may all gather the general drift of what he says. Yet unless we are of an equal brain with him, and of an equal culture and an equal devotion, how much—yes, and how much of what is best in it—we lose of his discourse! Some of us, because we have not his large and intimate knowledge of the Bible, fail to see how many of his sentences are based upon passages of Scripture or throw light upon them. Others of us, because we lack his culture, fail to catch half his allusions to the great writers on whom he has unconsciously formed himself; the very words he uses have not half the pleasant or instructive associations for us with which they are fraught for him. And still others of us, because we are not of a devout heart, or chance to be in an indocile and indevout mood, miss a thousand delicate indications of the spiritual purpose and intensity by which he is swayed.

In many different ways, then, we are like the idols of whom the prophet averred, "Ears have they, but they hear not." Through our ignorance, or our pre-occupation, or our lack of attention, or our imperfect sympathies, we are insensible to the meaning and charm of many of the sounds which fall upon our ears; we fail to hear, or to understand, many of the voices that address us: we lose much pleasure—and that of the purest, and much instruction—and that of the highest sort, which would inevitably come to us had our capacity of hearing been trained and developed. Above all, and worst of all, since here loss is most impoverishing, we miss the *spiritual* message and burden with which, for the spiritual ear, all things are fraught. Remember what lovely and pathetic parables our Lord was for ever *hearing* as well as speaking, when He dwelt among us. For Him the

whole realm of nature was instinct with spiritual significance, and all the relations, occupations, and events of human life. For Him they had voices, and voices that disclosed their inmost secret. The birds of the air spoke to Him, and the lilies of the fields, and the sower going forth to sow, and the housewife sweeping her floor or making her bread, and the very children as they played and wrangled in the marketplace. What a world that was through which *He* moved ; with what sweet and delicate voices it greeted Him ; what tender and lovely stories they were always telling Him ; what spiritual messages and consolations and encouragements and hopes they were for ever bringing Him ! It is the very same world through which we move ; yet what a dull and voiceless world it often is to us : how little it has to say to us : and, if we may judge by the tenour of our lives, what a poor and sordid message it often brings us ! To many of us the upshot of all the voices of this great fair world seems to be,—“Toil to-day, and fret about to-morrow ;” or “Take pleasure without enjoyment ;” or, “Eat, and drink, and die ;” or, “Make money and get on.” Alas, to many of us, how poor and base *are* all the uses of this world !

Have the world and human life, then, changed their voice, or their message, since Christ came and went ? Nay : because He came into the world, and has never really left the world, because He took our nature on Him and still wears it, the world and human life speak the more clearly to us, the more movingly, the more hopefully. The fault is in us, not in them, if we do not hear and apprehend their meaning. It was because He had ears to hear, and used them, that all things spake so musically, so spiritually to Him. It is because we have not ears to hear, or do not use them, that we do not take, or do not fully and always take, their meaning, but mistake it. Only as we use and cultivate our

faculty of spiritual hearing shall we ever catch, and rightly interpret, the voices which spake to Him by day and by night. He, then, that hath ears to hear, let him hear what God saith to us all, through the whole round of Nature and of human life.

But let him also hear "what the Spirit saith unto the churches." For there are voices in the Bible and in the spiritual experiences of humanity which as yet we have not heard, or have heard only in part and from afar. So many voices address us, we live amid such a din of confused utterances, and we are so pre-occupied with the daily vocation which makes a constant and imperative demand upon us, that, unless we are on our guard, the highest and most spiritual utterances will escape us. Many a man pleads, not wholly without reason: "I am so busy, so engrossed with labour and care; so many capacities in me are undeveloped, so many voices solicit my attention, and these voices are so contradictory and confused: how can I help it if I miss much that is said? how am I to tell which of these capacities I am to develop, to which of these contradictory voices I am to listen?" But the answer is plain, unmistakable. "Listen first to the highest voices. Study first to develop and train your highest faculties. Your spiritual nature, since that is confessedly highest, since that alone is capable of an eternal life, demands your first care. Give your first and best attention to that. Sacrifice whatever would prevent you from cultivating it, for such loss is gain indeed."

And if any man accept this solution of the problem, which surely is a reasonable one, and the only reasonable one, he knows well enough where to turn. If any man would "hear what the Spirit saith to the churches," he must come to the Church; he must study the Book of the Church; he must take part in the services and ordinances of the Church. In

the Bible he will find a great complex world of truth, quick with spiritual voices and influences which will address themselves to his spiritual needs. In the exercises of Christian worship, in sympathy and co-operation with other members of the Christian family, in the labours of a life grounded on spiritual motives and moving on to spiritual ends, he will receive the very training he needs. Through these the Spirit will speak *to him*, and will quicken in him the hearing ear and the thoughtful meditative heart. Under this gracious culture his spiritual faculties will unfold and "put on strength" until they dominate his whole nature, and mould to their own likeness the whole circle and tenour of his life. On these, in fact, the familiar and habitual exhortation of our Lord will have taken effect, and, by the grace of Christ, he will be roused to a diligent and loyal use of his spiritual faculties and gifts.

"He that hath ears to hear," then, "let him hear;" and, that he may hear, let him remember that his very capacity for hearing binds him to use and cultivate it.

VII.

St. Paul's Cloak, and Books, and Parchments.

2 TIMOTHY IV. 13.

TOWARD the close of his ministry—this at least is the most reasonable solution of the problem suggested by the hints concerning the course of his life and literary labours with which the Apostle himself furnishes us—St. Paul was *twice* imprisoned in Rome. During the first term of imprisonment, he seems to have been allowed a certain liberty,—liberty, for instance, to dwell in his own hired hut, and to preach the Word to as many as resorted to him ; but in his second term he appears to have been treated with much greater rigour (2 Tim. ii. 9), to have been straightly confined to the dark and miserable dungeon over which the palace of the Cæsars was erected, and to have left it only to meet death at the executioner's hand. Between these two terms of imprisonment he took a long journey, revisiting many of the Churches he had planted, in the company of a few faithful friends, among whom was Timothy, his beloved son in the Lord. Leaving them, or at least leaving Timothy, behind him, he hurried back to Rome, to stand his trial at the Imperial bar ; and so soon as he had arrived, apparently before he had rendered himself up, he wrote to Timothy, who was to follow him to Rome, begging him to bring with him when he came part of the baggage which the Apostle had left with a friend at Troas.

Now of all his friends Timothy was, in all probability, the dearest to the Apostle's heart. He seems to have adopted the young bishop as his very "son," as in some sense his heir and successor in the work of the ministry. Once he expressly says of him that he knew no man "of an equal soul" with him. And yet, as we can see from the two letters written to him by St. Paul, Timothy had his defects, and consequently his dangers; and though his very failings "leant to virtue's side," they were none the less likely to impair his usefulness. The conception we infer of him from the Apostolic letters is, that he was a diligent and devout student, of retiring habits, somewhat ascetic too, and diffident of himself when called to mix with men and to intermeddle with the conduct of public affairs. It sounds harsh to call these qualities—not too common in young men and ministers—*defects* in a young pastor or bishop; and no doubt there are many of us in whom they would be virtues rather than defects. And yet St. Paul warns Timothy against them very earnestly, warns him that they are likely to mar the completeness of his character and the success of his ministry. He is a young man, but he is to let no man despise his youth; and that they may not despise it, he is to stir up, to kindle and rekindle, the gift that is in him. On three points he is to exercise a special care. (1) He is of an ascetic turn or habit; he drinks no wine, although to his feeble stomach and overtaxed brain wine would be a wholesome stimulant; but asceticism is not to be the rule of the Church: let him therefore remember that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:" let him take a little wine for his health's sake, since weak health means bad work or imperfect work. (2) He is of a studious habit, prone to brood over the philosophical questions and speculations which then engaged the thoughts of men: instead

of brooding over such themes as "minister questions rather than godly edifying," let him study the pure and incorrupt Scriptures with an unremitting diligence, and hold fast the doctrines which he has learned of them, remembering always that "the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." (3) In his studious and ascetic seclusion from the world, he has grown shy and diffident, apt to forget his duties as a citizen or to undervalue or forego his rights: let him not forget either his rights or his duties: let him pray, and teach his hearers to make prayer and supplication for all men, for kings and all in eminent place—for the honest and godly, the quiet and peaceable conduct of public affairs: let him be alive to *this* aspect of the world around him, and have the due word to say to the poor and to the rich, to the bond and the free, and to all sorts and conditions of men. Thus he will prove himself a true bishop, a true son and successor of the Apostle.

These were among the counsels which St. Paul gave his "dear son," the principles by which he begged him to order his life. And, as we might expect from a man of his "incorrigible and losing honesty," these were principles on which St. Paul ordered his own life, down even to its most trivial details—even when he asked Timothy to bring him his cloak and books and parchments.

It has been thought strange, and below the dignity of Scripture, that the verse which embodies this request should have found a place in the New Testament. Yet who would wish that it had been omitted? It is such personal touches as this which quicken attention and gratify the natural desire we entertain to know all we can about such an one as St. Paul. It makes him more real to us, it shews him to be a man of like passions with us, that he should care to get back his old cloak and the books he had often thumbed.

And, moreover, the natural interest we feel in such a passage as this is justified the moment we find in it, as we may and ought to find, an illustration of the very principles on which St. Paul acted, and on which he counselled Timothy to act, in the larger relations of his life and ministry.

Let us mark, then, how truly these principles are at work in the Verse before us.

(1) St. Paul asks for his *cloak*,—apparently, one of those large, thick, and sleeveless wrap-alls, with an opening through which the head was thrust, then commonly worn by men who were about to expose themselves to cold and wild weather. Why does he ask for it? Simply because the winter was at hand (2 Tim. iv. 21), and there lay before him the prospect of confinement for some weeks or months in the dismal Mamertine dungeon, and he feels that his large thick cloak will be a comfort to him, that it will give some sense of warmth even to his susceptible and exhausted frame. He was no ascetic; he had warned Timothy against the sin of refusing, without adequate cause, any good creature of God, any lawful comfort, any innocent gratification that fell in his way, and had begged him, both for health and comfort's sake, to drink a little wine. And now he acts on his own principle. His cloak will be a comfort to him in the cold of winter and the damp dreary prison; and so, instead of refusing it, he takes some pains to get it.

Nor is it unworthy of remark that, in all probability, St. Paul cared a good deal more for the *old* cloak that he had left at Troas, and which had done him many a friendly turn in his perilous journeys among the mountains and across the sea, than he would have done for any new cloak his friends could have bought for him in Rome. Commentators, indeed, have grown pathetic over this request, and have bade us observe that St. Paul had only *one* cloak in the world, and that he was too poor to buy another. But surely we

need not doubt that among his converts and friends at Rome there were some who would gladly have furnished the aged Apostle with a cloak, had he cared for one, when he gave himself into the jailer's hands. And, therefore, I do not doubt that just as we—at least after we have lived a little while in the world—like an old coat, or an old hat, better than a new one, so the Apostle thought of his old cloak as an old friend, and felt that he should be more comfortable in that than in the costliest rug or wrapper exposed for sale in Rome. And here, therefore, he shews himself so little of an ascetic that he can not only take pains to get himself the comfort of a cloak, but can also take pains to get himself the additional comfort of the cloak that he likes best.

There may have been another reason why he preferred this cloak to any other. *He may have made it himself.* Professor Plumptre has shewn good reason for doubting that the Apostle took his place “simply among the *ouvrier* class,” that he was a mere artizan ; but he admits that the Apostle was master of the manual dexterities of his craft, and that he was often compelled to practise them. And the *kilikia*—the rough cloth woven from the long hair of the Cilician goats—was used for rugs and cloaks as well as for tents and tent-coverings. It is not unlikely, therefore, that St. Paul had woven a cloak for himself, and that he preferred his own handiwork to that of other men.

(2) Besides his cloak, St. Paul asks for his *books*, his *biblia*, which he had also left with Carpus. What were these books? There can be little doubt that they were the sacred writings of the Old Testament,—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—which were then gathered into separate rolls or volumes. And here, again, it is instructive to note that the Apostle was acting on a principle he had commended to Timothy. He had counselled his “son” to give himself earnestly to the study of those holy Scriptures with

which—thanks to Lois and Eunice—he had been familiar from his youth; and now he lets us see that he himself was bent on studying them down to the last moment of his life and amid all the miseries and distractions of his imprisonment. Yet if any man could have dispensed with these *biblia*, surely St. Paul might have dispensed with them. His memory was richly fraught with the facts of the Hebrew story and with the words of the holy prophets and psalmists. He himself enjoyed an inspiration at least equal to theirs; and how should he who could write Scripture need to study the Scriptures of other men? To him it was always easy to rise into a communion with God and with Christ which brought light into his darkness, order and clearness into his thoughts, peace into his heart. And yet, though his memory was so richly stored, though he was himself inspired, and was familiar with the illuminating joys of a Divine communion, he craved to have with him the Sacred Books which had often been to him a fountain of light and strength and consolation.

Here, too, it is worth while to mark that it was the very copies of Scripture which he had often used that he asked for. Copies of the Old Testament, or of parts of it, were common enough at that period among the Jews; and among the Christianized Jews at Rome there must have been many who could have lent him a copy of any Scripture he wished to peruse. But it was *his own* copies he wanted; and, probably, he wanted them in part because he liked them as we like an old Bible which has long been the companion of our studious and prayerful hours; because he could find any passage he was looking for more easily in his own copy than in a new one; and, in part, because he had made many marginal notes in his old copies, and had marked many passages which would help him to convince the Jews out of their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. For we

should gravely mistake the matter were we to suppose that, whether in arguing with his opponents, or in writing his Epistles, which stand thick with citations from the Old Testament, St. Paul found himself so inspired that he could dispense with the toils of thought and research. The Holy Ghost did not bring to his memory every passage that would bear on the topic he had in hand, but rather helped him to see the meaning of the ancient Scriptures as he pondered over them. We know that he possessed both the original Scriptures in the Hebrew, and the Greek translation of them (the Septuagint) ; for sometimes he quotes from the one and sometimes from the other. And we know that he had studied both ; for not only does he commonly use that one of the two which best suits the turn of his argument, but at times he departs from both and puts the thought of the ancient prophet into his own words.

And, no doubt, when he asked for the *biblia* he had left with Carpus, he was intending to continue his study of them in the Mamertine, and hoping that in his own copies he would find much that would help him in his study—many marks or notes which would recall former investigations and set him on pondering them anew.

(3) In addition to his cloak, and his books, St. Paul besought Timothy to bring him his *parchments*, literally, his *membranes*, or, as we may call them, his *documents*. What these parchments were is a question that has been much discussed. Some scholars have conjectured that they were note-books (*adversariæ*) in which the Apostle jotted down for future use any valuable thought or suggestion that occurred to him ; and that these note-books, as being in constant use, and exposed to wear and tear, were made of parchment instead of papyrus—a very reasonable conjecture. Others have concluded that they were copies of the Apostle's own writings—copies, *i.e.*, either of the

Epistles he had already sent to the Churches, or of Scriptures that he intended to give to the Church if life were spared him. Still others have conjectured that the *biblia*, the books made of papyrus (paper), as the slighter and cheaper material, contained the Apostle's own writings, and that the *parchments* contained copies of Old Testament Scriptures. Something might be said for each of these conjectures were there not another which instantly commands attention, and approves itself the more the more it is considered.

The word *biblia* would very well cover all the books, all the writings or copies of writings, which St. Paul cared to carry about with him wherever he went. But what else was there from which he would never like to be separated, and of which he would feel a very pressing need when he wrote to Timothy, a need so pressing as to account for the emphasis, "Bring my cloak, and the books, but *especially* the parchments"? We know very well that next to his Jewish blood he prized his Roman citizenship. He was forward to assert it, and even a little eager to shew that he held it in its most honourable form. Other men had purchased this "freedom" for a great sum of money, or had earned it by military service, or had stooped to pick it up from the mire of an Emperor's favour, or even from the grace of "a favourite;" but he was "freeborn," and was proud of the honour. We may be sure, therefore, that he would never willingly be without "the documents" which certified him to be a Roman citizen; and that he would bitterly regret that, in a moment of forgetfulness, he had left them behind at Troas. He had had frequent occasion for them in his eventful life, when he was haled before magistrates and judges. And he had very special occasion for them now, when he was to be tried for his life, and would need every evidence in his favour he could produce. Even if

the trial went against him, as he foreboded it would and as we know it did, these "parchments" might still be of use to him; for no Roman citizen could be legally put to torture or condemned to the cruel and ignominious forms of death to which the alien and the slave were exposed. And as it would be in vain for him to assert his citizenship unless he could produce the documents which formally attested it, we can well understand his anxiety to recover his parchments, and his desire that Timothy would use all diligence to bring them to him.

But if this be the true interpretation of St. Paul's phrase, he is but once more illustrating a principle on which he had counselled his son Timothy to act. He had urged him not to live the life of a recluse, but to mix with men; not to forget his duties and claims as a citizen in his devotion to study: and now we see that he himself was bent on affirming his rights as a Roman citizen to the last; and that in his devotion to his *biblia* and to the Church, he was not unmindful of the duties which he owed to the State and the State owed to him.

It is pleasant to find that even in penning a request for his cloak and books and documents, St. Paul was consistent with himself, and was really, though unconsciously, giving expression to great principles on which he moulded his life. But of course the most profitable use we can make of his words is to learn the lessons they imply; to take from them (1) a warning against asceticism, (2) an exhortation to constant and earnest study of the Scriptures, and (3) an incentive to the faithful discharge of civic and political duties.

VIII.

The Strength of Weakness.

2 CORINTHIANS XII. 9.

WHAT St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, or, rather, what his "*stake* in the flesh" was,—for so the word ought to be translated,—it is still impossible to determine. The Fathers of the early Church concluded it to be some bodily ailment, as, for instance, "a severe headache." Some of the later Fathers supposed it to be the opposition he encountered from the enemies of the faith, such an opposition as they themselves had constantly to brave. The monks of the Middle Ages pronounced it to have been that sting of sensual desire by which they were tormented in their solitary cells. Luther thought it was the spiritual conflict, the conflict with the great enemy of souls, which he himself had to wage. And now, again, the Commentators are, as a rule, reverting to the original theory,—that of some severe and disabling physical malady.

No other theory seems to meet the requirements of the case. For St. Paul's infirmity was "*an infirmity in the flesh.*" It must have caused him the most severe and excruciating pain, or he would not have represented himself as writhing under it in an agony comparable with that of a hapless wretch impaled on a stake. It must have impeded him in his work, or threatened to impede him, by exciting disgust

in those who saw and heard him, for he thanks his disciples in Galatia for not despising and loathing him for it, for not turning away from him and his message, but, contrariwise, receiving him as though he had been an angel of God. In short, from what he himself tells us of it, it could not have been any inward or spiritual trial; it must have been an excruciating pain, a pain he could not master and conceal, a pain which he loathed lest it should make him loathsome to others, a pain which hindered him in his work and threatened to disable him for it; and, moreover, a pain closely connected with, if not arising from, the abundance of his visions and labours.

These being the chief conditions to be met, it is impossible to assent to the hypothesis, else so reasonable and welcome, that the malady to which he refers as "a stake in the flesh" was physical blindness; for that could hardly have kept him in a torture so keen and excruciating as the phrase implies: it is much more likely to have been, as the best modern Commentators incline to believe that it was, some pronounced and malignant form of nervous disease. No man could have lived his life of perilous adventure and impassioned service, no man could have had his heart in such a tumult of excited, and often conflicting, emotions, no man could have passed through ecstasies like his,—seeing visions which rapt him into the third heavens and rendered it impossible for him to tell whether he was in the body or out of the body, without making dangerous and exhausting demands on his nervous and branular energy. The nervous trouble may have shewn itself in various ways, at different times,—as, indeed, it is apt to do,—in racking pains, in melancholia, in paralysis or partial paralysis of the organs of speech, by enervating the muscles, by simulating various forms of organic disease, by perilously depressing the vital force, or even in frightful epileptic or cataleptic seizures,

When he rose into his most earnest and impassioned utterances, when his spirit was most moved within him and his whole frame glowed with excitement, he may have been suddenly unable to articulate his words, or he may have fallen to the ground with foaming lips and writhing limbs, like a man smitten of God and afflicted. His liability to such seizures, and his dread of the horror and perplexity and disgust they could not fail to excite in those who witnessed them, may well have constituted the burden which he felt himself unable to bear.

But whatever his malady was, and whatever terrible or loathsome forms it took, to his sensitive mind it was as a stake in the flesh. He felt that he had "the sentence of death in himself," so that he often "despaired of life." And, worse still, he could never be sure that his "infirmity" would not shew itself while he was urging men to be reconciled unto God, and so impede him in the work to which he had devoted his life. Hence he thrice solemnly besought "the Lord," *i.e.*, the Lord Jesus Christ, that this infirmity in the flesh, which was also, at least in his eyes, a spiritual impediment, might depart from him. And thrice his prayer was at once refused and granted. Instead of delivering him from his agony, the Lord Jesus replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee : for strength is perfected in weakness." This was a new light to the afflicted Apostle. He had conceived of his infirmity as a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him ; Christ teaches him that it is an angel of God sent to minister to him. He had conceived of it as an indisputable and well-nigh fatal hindrance ; Christ teaches him that it is an indisputable and effectual assistance to him in his work ; that the strength which shines through weakness is the more conspicuous and the more impressive for the weakness through which it shines. But no sooner is St. Paul convinced that this *is* the meaning and purpose of his affliction

than he begins to glory even in infirmity. He accepts, welcomes, rejoices in the very burden which but now seemed utterly intolerable to him.

From the Greek of this passage it is quite obvious that the words, "*strength is perfected in weakness*,"—there is no "my" in the Original,—are an axiom, or proverb, and that they are intended to convey a law of the spiritual life. They are intended to teach us that, at least in the spiritual province, and for all men as well as for St. Paul, there is a certain finishing and perfecting power in weakness. Not that we are to cherish our infirmities, to remain children when we ought to be men, to continue weak when we may be strong. To be weak is to be miserable. It is not weakness which our Lord commends, but strength struggling against and striving through weakness. Weakness of itself will perfect nothing. But when strength and weakness are combined in the same nature, the weakness may prove a fine discipline for the strength ; it may induce watchfulness, prayer, a humble dependence on God, a tender consideration for the weaknesses of our fellows. Perfect strength is apt to be very far from perfect. It is apt to be rude, self-sufficient, untender. But a strength which has to contend with weakness, to pierce through hindrances, to shew itself through reluctant and imperfect organs, is likely to become a gracious and a friendly strength. If it is good to have a giant's strength but not to use it like a giant, then there is no discipline for strength like that of weakness.

In many ways we may see how weakness helps strength, and even becomes a kind of strength. What is it that makes every man ready to defend a woman or a child? Is it not their very weakness mutely appealing for help? Their weakness is in some sort their strength, then ; and they are safe where a man, able to defend himself, might be in danger.

What is it that makes Peter even dearer to us than John, and David than Daniel, and Jacob at least less insipid than Isaac? Is it not because in the former we see weaknesses such as we are conscious of in ourselves, and yet a divine strength striving through their weaknesses and transforming them into its own image? Jacob and David and Peter have a stronger hold upon us than if they had never sinned—not *because* of their sins, however, but because of their passionate repentance and renunciation of their sins; because, in them, we see strength slowly perfecting itself through weakness.

So, too, with St. Paul himself. He, if any man ever had, had the heavenly treasure in an earthen vessel; but the excellency of the treasure was only the more clearly seen because of the earthliness, the flaws and imperfections, of the vessel that contained it. He was a very man, a man such as we are, and yet how much better and braver than we are! We see our own weakness in him, but we also see a strength beyond our own perfecting itself in and by his weakness, and yet a strength which is not beyond our reach, since it is the gift of Christ. This very infirmity, for example, against which he prayed, keen as a stake driven through the body, only endeared him the more to those who knew and heard him, and made the power that was in him the more evidently Divine. Insignificant in presence, feeble in speech, assailed by a cruel malady which would have rendered another man loathsome and despicable,—how should *he* have spoken with such force, such passion, and to such wondrous purpose, had he not have been inspired from on high? how should he have compassed sea and land to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, how have stood before king and governors, how have answered all gainsayers with a wisdom and spirit they could not withstand, how have pierced the hearts of myriads with compunction and have

drawn them from their sins to the obedience of Christ, if God had not spoken by his mouth and wrought by his words? It was not his weakness that achieved these marvels; it was, rather, the strength of the "strong Son of God" which dwelt in him and turned his very infirmities to use. To the Galatians and the Corinthians he must have seemed as seems to us the skilful artist who draws the most exquisite and entrancing sounds from some rude instrument which will yield only harsh discords to our unskilled touch or breath; or, rather, he must have seemed like the rude pipe, or zithern, itself, played upon by some unseen and celestial power.

And to us he shews not less marvellous than to them. Traces both of his infirmity and of his strength are to be found in the Epistles that bear his name. Abrupt, rugged, often uncouth in style, they throb with a force of thought and passion such as we meet in no other writings. Lay your hand upon them, and you feel the Apostle's heart throbbing beneath them. No merely human words have won the ear and the heart of the world like his. Why? Because in him the strength of the Christ, who had been formed and cherished in him, was made perfect in and by his weakness; because we see how the whole man was mastered and possessed by the power that dwelt in him, a power greater than he could adequately express. Shakespeare, paraphrasing St. Paul, says,—

"He that of greatest works is finisher,
Oft does them by the weakest minister."

But it is equally true that God often accomplishes his greatest works by ministers who, great in themselves, are all the greater because their greatness is cleft with infirmities through which we see the Divine power working within them.

And here we can hardly fail to remember that the axiom, the paradox, "Strength is perfected in weakness," which fell from the lips of Christ, is true even of Christ Himself. *He* was "made perfect by the things which He suffered" when He "took our infirmities upon him and carried our weaknesses." It is the glory of God shining through the humanity which He assumed that endears Him to us. He was greater when, for us men and our salvation, He laid aside the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, than when He was clothed with that glory. We should never have known God as He is had not Christ become less than He was—less, and yet more; God *in* man, but also God *and* man. It was by bringing God into the weaknesses of our mortal flesh that He brought God near to us, and home to us, and made us "partakers of his divine nature." And though, in one sense, God is always the same, though his being and glory admit of neither diminution nor increase, yet, in another sense, is not God the greater and more glorious when his glory is reflected by a world which He has redeemed, and we are made of one heart and one will with Him? Shakespeare would have been as great if he had never have written one of his poems or plays; and yet would he have been as great? As great a man, perhaps, though even that is doubtful, but not so great an influence. And God would have been as glorious in Himself had He never come down and revealed his glory to us; but his glory would have been unseen, unreflected: and is it nothing to Him that we should see and partake his glory? Looking on Christ, then, we may say, that even the Divine Glory was perfected in human weakness.

Again: if nothing even in the life of Christ became Him like the leaving it, nevertheless his mortal weakness was most apparent on the Cross. In that He shared our death, as well as our life, He shewed Himself to be in every deed

a man such as we are. And yet, here also strength was perfected in weakness. The Cross of Christ draws and dominates the world. In the death of the Cross, in which He most shewed Himself a sharer of our infirmity, He also shewed a Divine strength, a love stronger than death. It was by thus abasing Himself that He won his power over us. As we contemplate the Sufferer hanging on the tree, dying that we might live, we are more profoundly touched and moved and impressed than as we conceive of Him sitting on the throne of heaven amid "the quirings of the young-eyed cherubim." We cannot say that his weakness *was* his strength; for had He died weakly—reluctantly, complaining of the injustice of God and the ingratitude of men—we could not have honoured Him as we do. But we may say that in Him strength was perfected in weakness. It is because He humbled Himself to death, because He endured death so meekly, so willingly, for us, that we try to live for Him, and count it shame if we do not love Him who so loved us.

And as it was with Him, so also it is with those who truly believe in Him. It is not their weakness which we admire, but the strength which is exercised by weakness and triumphs over it; it is not the cloud, but the sun that shines through the cloud; it is not the veil, but the divine beauty which shews through the veil; it is not their infirmities, but the Grace which is able to subdue their very infirmities to its own quality and complexion. Just as all men admire the constant resolute spirit which triumphs over the languors of a sickly frame and exacts from it well-nigh impossible achievements, so we admire the gracious spirit which masters and subdues the lusts of the flesh, the gusts of passion and self-will, and forces from a poor and ungenial temperament the "white flower of a blameless life" rich with the fragrance of a genial charity. We expect wisdom from the

wise, and courtesy from the well-born, and service from the strong, and a gracious bearing from those who have been reared amid the refinements of culture. But when we see, as in the Church we often may see, men and women who are gentle and kindly, serviceable and wise, although they are simple and unlettered and have known no culture save that of the School of Christ, how can we but admire the grace of God in them? It is these "little ones" who are really great; it is these weak ones who are truly strong. Strength is perfected in their weakness.

And as in their life, so also in their death, they often move us to wonder and admiration, to self-abasement and yet to hope. We see them lingering on through weeks or months of pain and weakness with an unforced and cheerful patience; longing to depart, yet ready to remain; grateful for the slightest alleviation of their sufferings, yet uncomplaining however sharp their pangs may be; welcoming every kind word or word of comfort that may be spoken to them, but quite unconscious that, in their cheerful resignation and uncomplaining meekness, they are preaching to all who stand by them homilies of a more pathetic and impressive eloquence than the tongue of the orator can frame. Who that has ever witnessed such a spectacle as this, and seen the frail yet constant spirit pass into the great darkness radiant with the light of faith and love and hope, has not thanked the God who has given such gifts to men as can perfect strength even in the hour of mortal weakness? Who has not blushed that, in the vigour and pride of life, *he* should be doing so little for God and man, while even the weak and dying were doing so much? And who has not conceived the hope that the Grace which makes them more than conquerors over death may prove sufficient for him when *his* strength shall be turned to weakness, and death, the angel with a veil, shall be sent to summon him away?

IX.

Life and Death as Antagonists of Love.

ROMANS VIII. 38—39.

AN able and ingenious critic proposes to read the sentence thus: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor *even* life, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is questionable whether the Greek will bear that rendering; but there can be no question that the thought which it suggests is true, although it contradicts a very general and familiar persuasion. We all admit that, in a certain sense, both Life and Death are antagonists of Love; but if we were asked, Which is the greater antagonist of the two? most of us would answer, "Death; not Life:" whereas it is Life, not Death, which is the more fatal to Love. Life is often the death of Love: whereas Death commonly gives Love new life.

"Who," or "what," demands the Apostle, "shall separate us from the love of Christ?" And in his reply he gives us two catalogues of the various powers and influences which we fear as likely to weaken or to alienate our love from Him in whose love we live. In his first catalogue he enumerates, "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, sword;" in his second catalogue he enumerates, "death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present and things to come, height and depth." As we follow and consider his words,

the first catalogue presents no difficulty to our thoughts ; we feel, we acknowledge, that the rigours of pain, want, hunger, danger have often strangled love ; we forbode that, were we long exposed to them, our love might die. But the second catalogue is more difficult : we ask, for instance, How should "height" or "depth," or, again, How should "angels," separate us from the love of Christ? And it is not until we perceive that St. Paul is indulging in one of those passionate and rhetorical outbursts which are characteristic of his style that his words shoot into light. But then, when we seize this clue and follow it, we understand that, in the rapture and exaltation of his spirit, he defies all heaven and earth to extinguish, or even to lessen his love for Christ, or Christ's love for him : the very "angels and principalities" of heaven, supposing them capable of the endeavour, could not shake him from his rest, nor all the "powers" of hell,—no vicissitudes of time, whether "present" or "to come," nor aught within the bounds, the "heights and depths," of space. Strong in the love of Christ, he is more than conqueror over them all. "Death" cannot move him, although it introduce him into new and untried regions of existence ; nor "even life" itself, although life is the severer test of love and has often proved its death.

This is the general scope and intention of St. Paul in the passage before us : and taken thus—in this order, in this sense—it carries us back to the point at which we started, viz., that both Death and Life are in some sort to be feared as the antagonists of Love, but that Life is by far the stronger and more deadly antagonist of the two.

Now that men fear Death, as likely to separate them from the love of God, to impair their union with Him, or, perchance, to put them beyond his reach, is beyond a doubt. There is nothing which most men fear so much as death ; nothing, alas, which most Christians fear so much. We have

an instinctive and natural dread of it, which even faith finds it hard to conquer, to which our imperfect faith often lends an additional force. It is not only the darkness and decay of the tomb that we dread; it is also the judgment which lies beyond the tomb. It is not only that we are loth to part with those whom we love; we also fear, lest, in the pangs of death, we should relax the grasp of faith. And, hence, in our Service for the Dead, we use a prayer than which few are more pathetic: "O Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, *suffer us not at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee.*" A most pathetic, and yet, as we often mean it, a most un-Christian prayer! For what we too commonly imply by it is that if, amid the pangs of dissolution and the darkness of death, we should cease to see God by faith and to put our trust in Him, He will forsake us! that if, oppressed by mortal weakness, we loosen our hold upon Him, He will let us fall! that at the very crisis, and in the very circumstance, in which an earthly friend would strengthen his comforting grasp on us, our heavenly Friend will relax his grasp and let us drop into the darkness which waits to devour us up! Whereas Christ has taught us that God's help is nearest when we most need his help, that He perfects his strength in our weakness, that our redemption from all evil depends, not on our fluctuating sense of his Presence, nor on our imperfect love for Him, but on his being with us although we know it not, and his eternal unbounded love for us.

Indeed our whole conception of Death is in much un-Christian. We do not realize, as we might and should, that for us death means life and immortality, a nearer access to God, a clearer vision of his glory, a more perfect participation of his grace and peace. We have so little faith in God and in his wise ordering of the universe that we can hardly

rise to the level of Schiller's fine saying, "Death happens to all, and cannot therefore be an evil." We persist in taking it as an evil, although we know, or might know, it to be a good.

Let us consider for a moment how the case stands, and learn once more how baseless are our terrors, how faithless and irrational our fears. There are perhaps twenty millions of men living and moving in England at this day: but how many millions on millions lie beneath its soil? If, instead of sleeping in the earth, the dead were laid upon its surface,—where could we plant a foot without profaning their ashes? More than two thousand years ago the Romans had a suggestive periphrasis for death. When they lost a friend, instead of saying, "He is dead," they said, "He has gone over to the majority." The majority! Yes, and how vast a majority! how populous is the mighty kingdom of the dead! *And yet we dare weep for them!* Might not they much more reasonably weep for us? If we believe that God cares for the few millions now on the face of the earth, can we believe that He does not care for the innumerable millions who have not passed from his sight because they have passed from ours? If He cares for the small minority who now inhabit the world, must He not care for that vast majority who, for aught we know, may still be in this world, though they are invisible to us? If *we* are not separated, can *they* be separated, from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord and theirs? It is incredible. To despair of the dead is to distrust God. To fear death is even more unreasonable than to fear life.

Let us take an argument as well as an illustration from our own experience. What does *that* teach us of Death and Life as Antagonists of Love? Death *is* an antagonist of Love: for it takes from us those whom we have learned to love: it separates us from them; we can no longer see

them, and serve them, and lavish on them the tokens and proofs of our regard. But though death severs us and them, does it sever *love*? does it extinguish, or even lessen, our affection for them? Does it not rather enlarge, refine, consecrate our love for them? They take a special dear-ness and sanctity in our thoughts. We forget what was lacking or imperfect in them. We think only of their better qualities, of how good they were, how staunch, how kind. There never was a true love yet which did not conquer death, which death did not hallow and deepen and make perfect. But does *Life* always elevate love and enlarge and sanctify it? We know that there is no such searching and crucial test of love as life, with its monotonous toils and cares, its vicissitudes and provocations, its inevitable differences of view and collisions of will. Whereas Death confirms and hallows love, Life often diminishes and desecrates it. Many who stood before the altar with a strong and sincere affection for each other have afterwards gone, by different paths, with alienated hearts, to distant graves. Life, with its cares and disappointments, its constant friction of will with will, mood with mood, temper with temper, has snapped the bonds which Death would have soldered close for ever.

And as with human love, so with love Divine. *Death* cannot detach our love from God; for it brings us closer to Him; it shews Him to us more nearly as He is, and thus constrains us to a more profound, a more constant and perfect love for Him. But *Life*, with its anxieties and toils, its trials and temptations, is for ever calling our thoughts away from Him, moving us to forget or to distrust Him, inspiring us with motives, affections, aims, alien and opposed to his will. If we have any true spiritual life in us,—is not this the very burden of our confessions and prayers, that we do not love Him as we ought and would; that we are not like Him,

that while He is righteous, we are unrighteous, while He is kind, we are unkind ; that even when we would do good, the evil in us overcomes the good : and that we are thus becoming more and more unworthy of his love, more and more unworthy to live with Him and to abide in his House ? Alas, no sooner do we consider ourselves than we find that, if we fear Death, we have much more reason to fear Life, and its power to alienate us from God and Christ ! The more we consider and know ourselves the more welcome to us grows St. Paul's persuasion, that neither death, nor even life itself, is able to separate us from the love of God ; that, if our love for Him be cordial and sincere, however imperfect it may be, it will nevertheless conquer all the opposing forces of Life no less than all the powers of Death.

And St. Paul's persuasion may well be at least our *hope*. For if death cannot lessen our love of man or woman, although it separates us from them,—how should death lessen our love for God when, instead of separating us from Him, it conducts us to his Presence, unites us more intimately with Him, shews us more perfectly how good He is, how worthy of our love ? Life, indeed, is more perilous than Death : but for every case in which we see the inevitable cares and collisions of life alienate two loving hearts, we may see a score in which they only bind them into a closer and more sacred unity. And God, remember, has none of those defects of character which alienate us from men and women whom once we held dear. To love Him is to love righteousness, truth, goodness, gentleness, peace. He is at once the Ideal and the Incarnation of all excellence. We shall never, as we grow wiser and more experienced, discover anything in *Him* to lessen our love and reverence. The danger lies in our own defects, in our partial knowledge of Him, in the instability of our best affections, in our too frequent preference of a love inferior to his, of a good

less complete and satisfying than that which He bestows. Happily, He knows us altogether. Happily, He suffers long and is kind; He is very forbearing and of a most tender mercy. If once we truly love Him, if our hearts are really set on goodness and truth and charity, He will forgive our inconstancy, our imperfections and defects; He will use the infinite resources of his wisdom and power and grace to develop our love, to supply our defects, to chasten us from our faults, to make us what we would be, to lift us into an unwavering constancy, an eternal righteousness and peace. Weak and inconstant as we are, we may at least *hope* that He will not suffer even life itself to separate us from Him.

Thus far, however, we have taken the phrase "love of Christ" or "love of God" as denoting *our* love for them. It may also cover *their* love for us. Some Commentators affirm, indeed, that the question of Verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" means, "Who shall detach *our* love from Christ?" and that the assertion of Verse 39, that nothing shall "separate us from the love of God in Christ," means that nothing will ever alienate *their* love from us. The exegesis is doubtful; but the thought to which it gives expression is beyond all doubt. Our conception of this passage will not be complete unless it embrace both these ideas. For our love to God depends on his love for us. If his love can be shaken, our love will not abide. And, therefore, we may be sure that—somewhere in the passage, perhaps throughout it—St. Paul meant to speak of God's love for us as well as of our love for Him. And of his love for us we need have no doubt, whatever becomes of ours for Him. Even at our best we may only be able to *hope* that our love will not change; but we may know beyond all question that, even if our love should change, God's will not. Nothing can by any means separate us from that. Whom He loves, He loves to the end; for there is no end

to his love. What power can Death, or even Life, have over *Him*? Death may separate *us* from those who are dear to us; Life may estrange us from them: but how can Death separate any soul from *Him*? or how can the vicissitudes of Life estrange Him from any soul of man? His kingdom includes all; it lies on both sides the grave, this and that. The dead live to Him; to Him the living die. We are the offspring of his love; for if He did not love us, and design our good, why should He have made us? And those He once loves, He loves for ever. He *is* Love; He cannot deny Himself.

But we must not limit and measure his love by our own, although our love is the best image of his and our best help toward understanding Him. It does not follow that, because He loves all his creatures with a love over which neither Life nor Death has any power, that they will all be happy, or even that they will all ultimately be blessed with life eternal. His love, simply because it seeks the welfare of all, can be very stern. So can our love be; so *is* our love, in proportion as it is wise and strong. We can correct our children for their good; we can expose them to much pain, compel them to toils which they dislike, and even permit them to misconceive and distrust us. If we see a poor bird in incurable agony, we can crush it out of its pain because we love it. Because we love it, we can shoot a dog or a horse, when it is hopelessly diseased. If we see a child incurably vicious, or a man utterly brutalized and degraded, we can say, "Well for him that he had never been born!" Even while our hearts tremble with awe and pity we can send the irredeemable criminal to death, or to a life more hard and cruel than death. It is our very love for men, and even for the wretched criminal himself, which gives us strength to pronounce such a doom upon him. To hang a man may be the worst use to which we can put him;

but, if he will not be put to any better use, that worst use may be the best of which he is any longer capable.

Love can bear pain, then, bear even to inflict pain, if the love be pure and deep and strong. And God's love is perfect. It is pure and deep and strong beyond our thoughts. It shines a stedfast Light through all the changes of Life, through all the separations of Death; for it shines down from a heaven above their reach. Because his love is so pure, so enduring, so inexhaustible, it can take forms of correction; because it seeks our good, it can inflict the discipline, the toils and pains, which make us good. *It may be* that even as our love despairs of some of his wounded and degraded creatures, and thrusts them out of this life, so He may see that some men need even sterner corrections than this life affords, and that some, wholly incorrigible, must be destroyed from his Presence and the glory of his power. But, however that may be, we may be sure of this, that nothing can separate any soul of man from his love, whether in life or in death. And in this lies our hope, our rest. God's love cannot change, however we may change. If his infinite Love *can* recover us to life and righteousness and peace, we shall be recovered: if we are irrecoverable, what better proof of his love can He give us than to put us out of our misery and degradation in the thick darkness of an eternal death? So long as we have any love for Him, any craving for goodness, for truth, for peace, we must be recoverable—nay, we have the witness in ourselves that we are being recovered by his grace; and therefore so long as we love Him, we may be fully persuaded, with St. Paul, that neither death, nor even life, can possibly separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But before we can *rest* in this persuasion, we must know and feel that *we* love Him who first loved us. We cannot rest in the mere conviction that He loves us; for, as we

have seen, his love may compel Him to chasten and afflict our souls in life and in death : it *may* even compel Him, if we prove incorrigible, to destroy us out of our misery. If we would be sure that we shall never sink until we become "unworthy of life eternal," we must now and here lay hold of that life. For, obviously, we have no right to count on any future grace if we neglect the grace which is now bestowed upon us. Obviously, if we do not improve our present opportunities, if by neglecting and abusing them we harden and deteriorate in character, we lessen our power of using any opportunities which the future may bring. If we are not to stake our all on an ominous Peradventure, if we are to have any grounded persuasion, any hope even, of future life and virtue and blessedness, we must faithfully employ our present means of grace ; we must now form at least those rudiments of character which are to be developed hereafter. We shall want God's love when we die, and when we pass through death into the unknown region which lies beyond its farther bourn ; but how can we hope to have it then, and to delight in it, if we put it from us now and shrink even from thinking too much about it? Take an untutored child of the streets into an elegant and refined home ; constrain him to adapt himself to the habits which use has made second nature to you ; lavish on him the delicate signs of courtesy and affection which culture has taught you to appreciate ; breathe round him an atmosphere of order, purity, gentleness, love ; and the poor outcast will simply hate and resent the change ; at the very first chance he will fly back to his old habits of life. And, in like manner, it may very well be that, when we pass out of this rude world, if we should find ourselves in the presence of an Infinite Love ; if we should find ourselves within a kingdom of heavenly order and purity and peace, it may very well be that the light of that Love will kindle on us like a

fire, if we are strangers to it, and all that sweet order and concord and stainless purity be simply intolerable to us. If we are sensual, sordid, selfish here, how can we hope, all at once, to relish that which is spiritual, noble, unselfish, Divine? Before we can be persuaded that nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God, and can rest and delight in that persuasion, we must be made partakers of the Divine Nature, *i.e.*, of the Divine Character; the baser self in us, which delights in sensuous pleasures, in sordid gains, in the pursuit of self-interest and self-indulgence, must be brought into subjection to that better self which delights itself in the Almighty, which attaches itself to that which is spiritual, which craves to bring a Divine order and beauty and peace into our whole nature and into the world around us.

If we ask: "But *how* is this Divine Character to be attained? how are we to rise into this better self and to mortify that in us which is base and sordid and selfish?" St. Paul replies, "You must have the love of God shed abroad in your hearts." Now many of these New Testament phrases about "love" have sunk into so mere a cant that, possibly, St. Paul's answer is no answer to many of us, simply because it conveys no clear thought to our minds. But if we consider it for ourselves, if we shake it free from the cant that has stuck to it, we shall find it a very clear and pertinent answer. For what, after all, is it which tells most on human character? Is it not love? Does any other passion change and elevate and hallow character like this, and make a man a new and a better man? When it is not a mere craving of the senses, nor even a mere longing for sympathy, nor both combined,—*i.e.*, when it is true genuine love, does it not conquer the baser and selfish instincts of the soul? has it not, again and again, drawn men from their vices, lifted them out of the mire of self-indulgence, and infused into

them a power which has transfigured their whole nature and raised them into a pure and noble life?

But what *is* this love? what is the secret of its power? Is not all true love at bottom an admiration of excellence and a desire to possess it? The woman sees in the man, or thinks she sees, a larger, stronger, firmer character than her own—less at the mercy of impulse, able to stand against the blows of circumstance and the shocks of change,—a fairness, a justice, a quiet strength on which she can lean, and which will save her from her own defects. And the man sees in the woman a character more delicate and refined, more pure, more flexible than his own, more open to “melting charity,” more patient under pain, more tender and yielding;—in short, a character which is the complement of his own, rich in all he wants, yet receptive of all that he can give. The manly vigour and beauty, and the womanly comeliness and grace, which at first attract us, are the mere outward signs of these moral characteristics; and Love interprets them, and the man grows dear to the woman, and the woman to the man, in proportion as their reading of each other proves true, in proportion as they find in each other the qualities they hoped to find.

But if love for man or woman can thus change and elevate the character, why not love for God? If love be indeed an admiration of excellences we do not possess and a desire to complete our nature by appropriating them, the love of God must be simply the most transforming and elevating of all emotions: for in God are all excellences, human and divine. We cannot for very reverence say that God is more tender than a woman and stronger than a man; for to his tenderness there is no limit, to his strength no bounds. He is fair and kind, He is tender and true, He is wise and strong beyond our farthest reach of thought. If we have any love of excellence, we cannot but love Him so soon as we really know Him.

How then, may we know Him? and so know Him that we may love Him? and so love Him as that nothing, neither Death, nor even Life, can separate us from his love? St. Paul suggests a reply in the words, "the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" If we would know God and love Him, we must find Him in Christ, in that Perfect Man—so strong and yet so gentle, so true yet so tender—who moves before us in the gospels. Is it difficult to love *Him*? It is not difficult to admire and praise Him. There is hardly the man in Christendom who does not do that. Even those who reject his claim to be one with the Father, even those who hold the Gospel to be but a late and imperfect tradition overlaid with many incredible fables, even those whose keen eyes detect flaws in his character and teaching,—even these admit that no man ever lived or spake like Him, that He is, beyond all rivalry, the wisest and best of the sons of men. It is not hard, then, to admire and praise Christ; but to love Him *is* hard; for *that* takes faith. We often think of faith simply as an organ by which we perceive things to come; but faith also makes the past real and vital to us. Faith is the shaping spiritual imagination which, as we read the Gospels, makes Christ live and speak, which detects the God in Him, which teaches us that his love is nothing less than Divine.

So that, as the conclusion of the whole matter, we come to this: that, if we would have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, we must faithfully study the Gospels which reveal Christ to us. As we study them in faith, as Christ shapes Himself to us, not as the central figure of an historical painting, but as a Man among men, *the* Man of men; as we see how strong He was against evil and yet how tender to men, not despairing even of the vilest, but full of an exquisite, pathetic, and redeeming hope for them, the conviction will grow upon us that his love was in very deed

the love of God, that God loves us as Christ loved men, and *will not* despair of us or give us up. And when once this conviction is reached, we must be other and less than men if we do not respond to his love with a love that will be the beginning of a new life in us, a life from which nothing can by any means separate us, whether within or beyond the bounds of time and space.

X.

The Hundred-fold.

ST. MATTHEW XIX. 27-29.

ST. PETER'S question was a vulgar and a selfish question, yet it received a very generous reply. Mere pity for the young Ruler who was sorrowfully leaving Christ ought to have kept him from asking it, or mere sympathy with his Master, who was at least as sorry to see the Ruler go as the Ruler was to leave Him, and to leave Him *so*. But for the moment Peter was occupied with himself and his few intimate companions; he had no thought, no care, for the thousands who could not resolve to leave all they had for Christ's sake and the gospel's, and still less thought or care for the world at large. For the moment his spirit was at least as alien from that of his Master as was the spirit of the young Ruler himself. Nevertheless the Lord Jesus shews the most delicate consideration for his selfish pre-occupation. He asks for reward! Well, he shall have a reward, and a reward far greater than any of which he has dreamed. Hereafter, he and his brethren shall be kings under the King; when the Son of Man sits in the throne of his glory, they shall sit on twelve thrones and rule the twelve tribes of Israel.

But if they—and I suppose that, as usual, St. Peter was only the spokesman of the rest—can think only of them-

selves, Christ cannot think only of them. He gives them the promise they longed to hear ; but, having given it, He forthwith generalizes it. Not they alone, but *every one* who leaves anything for Christ's sake shall receive a hundred-fold—"now in this present time," as St. Mark adds—and shall inherit eternal life.

Now this great generalized promise has perplexed many thoughtful and devout minds, the minds of many who do not doubt that Christ will be as good as his word. They can trust Him for their future reward, and leave themselves in his hands without misgiving or fear. They are conscious that they already inherit the spiritual and eternal life He promised to confer ; and they can readily conceive that, in the world to come, this life, freed from the hindrances and restraints of their "mortal part," will unfold energies and graces which cannot bud and blossom in this world's unkindly weather. But they do not see that any earthly possessions, or ties, or pleasures, which they have abandoned for his sake, are restored to them on earth, now, in this present time ; and not only restored, but multiplied a hundred-fold. It will be time well spent, therefore, if we meditate on this great promise until its hidden meaning grows plain and clear.

Its general intention or principle seems to be, that Christ will be no man's debtor ; that it is always gain to lose what we leave for Him ; that whatever we give to Him becomes more truly and intimately our own ; that whatever we lay up with Him will be returned again with usury ; that in his recompenses Christ uses large measures, "pressed down, shaken together, and yet running over."

This is Christ's general law of recompense, a law here stated in the paradoxical form commonly used not by Jesus only, but also by all the great Jewish teachers of his time. But in seeking to define and vindicate it, we must remem-

ber, first, that, though at times men may have to leave houses and lands, and even to sacrifice kinships both of blood and affection, in order that they may be true to Christ, at other times, at most times even, we can only be true to Him by using our possessions wisely and for the good of our fellows, and by our fidelity to the kinships in which we are placed and the attachments we have formed. No man serves Christ by simply renouncing all that he has, or by breaking loose from any tie of blood or friendship. Then only do we serve Him by forsaking our natural ties, or our acquired possessions, when they come between us and Him, when we must renounce either Him or them. Throughout the Gospels He claims to stand first with us; and He advances this claim because, only as we love Him supremely, can we love our neighbours as we should, or use our possessions so as to get from them the full benefit they are capable of yielding us. In short, what his demand on us really comes to is, that our spiritual interests and affections should engage our chief attention; and that where it is necessary, and *only* where it is necessary, our temporal interests and our natural affections should be sacrificed or subordinated to them.

We must observe, also, that in this great promise our Lord calls away our thoughts from that which is outward to that which is inward, from that which we *have* to that which we *are*; and intimates that our true property, or wealth, consists not in any of the possessions from which we must soon part, but in the powers and gifts of that life which neither change nor death can touch. The Apostles were thinking of houses and lands, parents and children, thrones and principedoms; Christ speaks to them of life, the life eternal, as their true inheritance; the life which, when once it has been quickened, can never die; the life which, as it unfolds its energies and graces, makes us ever more fully "partakers of God," and

even of that sway over all that is in the world which is the prerogative of God. It is as though He had warned them: A man's wealth does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth, but in the power of an endless life, in the vigour and variety of its energies and capacities, in his ability to get the real good of all that is around him, even though it be not, in the legal sense, his own. Once let him rise into a spiritual life, a divine life, and all things become his, since he can make them all—even loss and pain, change and death—contribute to his welfare and swell the volume of his life.

We must observe, again—what the Disciples, who were accustomed to his picturesque and paradoxical style, would instantly discern—that the promise of our Lord, while it has a very real and literal sense, has also a figurative and spiritual sense. Some of the relationships here mentioned, for example, cannot be literally multiplied a hundred-fold; others of them could hardly be thus multiplied without becoming a curse to us instead of a blessing. One cannot have a hundred fathers or mothers; and surely no sane man would wish to have a hundred children or a hundred wives.

What, then, is the meaning of the Promise, that which gathers into itself all its various senses and aspects, and reconciles them? Perhaps it may be summed up and expressed under these three heads: (1) That in Christ, in his love and service, we find all that makes our kinships and possessions of real worth to us; (2) That in Him we find corresponding, yet superior, possessions and relationships to those which we resign, or may have to resign, for his sake; (3) That in virtue of our oneness with Him we possess all things and persons in a deeper truer way.

1. *We find in Christ, in loving and serving Him, all that makes our natural kinships and our possessions of real worth*

to us. What are our possessions—as houses and lands, and our kinships—as the ties which bind us to father and mother, wife and child, good for? what is it that gives them their value? for what ultimate end were they conferred on us? If we consider that question, whether from the Christian or the philosophical point of view, I think our conclusion must be: that our kinships and possessions are valuable to us, and reach their true end, only as they minister to our welfare and culture, as they develop our various faculties and powers, as they furnish us with opportunities of serving our fellows, and both enable and incline us to avail ourselves of them. God has grouped us in families and bound us to each other by many sacred and tender ties in order that we may love and help each other, and that, by loving and serving each other, we may develop and train, in ourselves and in those around us, the virtues and affections by which both we and they are raised in the scale of being and are led on to the highest perfection of which our nature is capable. Out of the great common patrimony which He has bestowed on the race at large, He secludes a little for each one of us, makes it in a special sense our own, in order that we may learn to use and administer it—use it, not for our own ends alone, but for the general welfare. To have much, or many things, is not in itself an advantage; it may be a grave disadvantage: it is a grave disadvantage if we neither possess nor develop the power to use them wisely, so to use them that we become wiser and better men and help to make other men wiser and better. To have many kinsfolk and friends will not help us towards the true end of our being unless we can so occupy the kindly relations in which we stand as to do good by them and to get good from them. No man is the better, or even the better off, for simply having a large account with his bankers, or for owning a large estate; if he spend his money or manage his

estate foolishly, if he uses what he has mainly for base and sensual purposes, he does but shew that he is incapable of using it aright, that it has got into the wrong hands, hands too, from which it will soon slip, leaving him the poorer and the worse for his temporary possession of it. And, in like manner, no man is the better or the happier simply for having a large circle of relatives and friends. If either he or they fail to cultivate these kinships for high and noble ends, if they employ the influence which kinship gives to degrade each other, to encourage one another in maintaining a low and selfish tone, they may very easily be the worse and the poorer for the very affinities which ought to have contributed to their well-being.

Now suppose any man to have come clearly and honestly to the conclusion that he can only be true to Christ and his own soul by parting with something which he possesses, and in which the world tells him that his wealth consists; or suppose he finds—as he may very well do even in times when there is no persecution for conscience' sake—that he must break with some kinsman, or give up a former friend: put the case that he must sacrifice his wealth, or some considerable portion of it, or that he must conquer an attachment which is injurious to his moral and spiritual welfare: will he really lose anything by making this sacrifice for Christ's sake and the Gospel's? will he not rather gain by it? Goods were given for his good; if he is the better man, the more capable and serviceable, the more virtuous and noble and devout for sacrificing his goods, or some of them, he gains by sacrificing them the very ends for which they were bestowed on him, and is the richer for his loss. He has added to the power and value and quality of his life; and his "life" is the only thing that death will leave him. In like manner, if a man has to conquer an attachment which is weakening and degrading him, he may lose a friend

and all the comfort or pleasure he might have received from and through him ; but for what were friends and relatives given save that he and they should minister to each other's well-being? If his welfare can be secured only by losing a friend, is not the loss a gain? And may not the loss be gain even to the friend he renounces when that friend discovers the motive of the renunciation? The Twelve gave up home and livelihood, father and mother, wife and children ; that is, they gave up the use and comfort of them for a time ; but did not they gain immensely by the sacrifice, and gain in those very ends of moral and spiritual culture to promote which kinships and possessions are conferred on men? Verily, they had their hundred-fold, and that now, in this present time.

2. *We find in Christ corresponding, yet superior, relationships and possessions to those which we resign for his sake.* Houses and lands, kinsfolk and friends, are intended for our culture in virtue and righteousness and charity ; they are also the express types of higher kinships which are open to us, and of a more enduring riches. From the father of our flesh we derive our first and best conception of the Father of our spirits. The love of woman helps us to apprehend and trust the love of Christ. The obedience and simplicity of childhood speak to us of the wiser simplicity and nobler obedience of discipleship. The corruptible treasure on earth symbolizes, in many ways, the incorruptible treasure in heaven. And if we leave, or lose, any of these typical relationships and possessions for Christ's sake, we gain that which they typify—a house not made with hands, the treasure which moth cannot corrupt, the family in heaven and in earth, the Father of an infinite majesty, the Friend who is our Brother and who sticketh closer than a brother. Do we lose by such an exchange as this, or gain—gain infinitely? It is not often that men are called to

forsake all they have and all they love in order to follow Christ. Commonly the more difficult duty is imposed upon us of using all for our own good and for the good of our fellows. But even those who have been constrained to leave home and country, father and mother, wife and child, have in very deed received the hundred-fold now in this present time if they have become freemen of the eternal city, and could call the house of many mansions their own, if they have found a tender and loving Father in the God whom they once feared, and a redeeming Brother in the Lord who was once rejected and despised of men.

3. *In virtue of our oneness with Christ we possess all things and persons in a deeper truer way.* It is not only that when we suffer and lose for Christ's sake—*i.e.* in order that we may be true to the principles He taught and incarnated—we gain a title to the great inheritance; but that in very deed all things become ours, and the power, as well as the right, to appropriate them all.

For, strictly speaking, a man's property is exactly what he can appropriate; *that*, and not a jot more. If, for example, a man buys a parcel of ground, fences it in, builds a mansion on it, lays out a garden, plants a park, no doubt it is his in the full legal sense; and yet no law, no title conferred by law, can make it really his. It may be mine far more truly than his. If when I go over his mansion and gaze on the works of art that adorn it, or walk through his grounds and study their exquisite complexities of form and colour, light and shade, I see in them innumerable beauties which, for lack of brain or lack of culture, he cannot discern in them; if they teach me lessons he cannot learn, and quicken in me deep and pure emotions to which he is insensible, they are mine in a far higher sense than that in which they are his; and they are mine, rather than his, simply because I can appropriate more of that which is in them, and of that

which is highest and best in them. In me they have subserved a noble use; they have kindled my imagination, cultivated my intellect, touched and purified my heart. A thousand accidents may destroy his legal possession of them—a fire, a bankruptcy, a death; but no accident, not even death itself, can disturb my possession of them; they have entered into my life, shaped my nature, become a part of my very being. And so, “a thing of beauty *is* a joy for ever” to as many as can study and appreciate it.

But if a neighbour should follow in my steps, if he too should look out over the fair demesne and let its beauties sink into his soul; and if, besides my merely æsthetic enjoyment of them, he can lift an unpresumptuous eye to heaven, and say, “*My Father* made them all;” if he feel that the varied loveliness of stream and sky, of cloud and sunshine, of tree and flower has been given by God in order that he and his fellows may enjoy and profit by them; if he permit them to quicken new faith, love, hope, peace in his soul—they are even more fully his than they are mine; for he has got a still deeper and more enduring good out of them; he has compelled them to minister to his highest welfare. They are *his* in a sense in which they can belong to none but those who are like-minded with himself, and whose spirits are as readily touched to fine issues.

Take another illustration of this important but too-much-forgotten truth. Here, say, is a picture by one of our great masters: it has for subject a noble landscape, or a fine historic incident. And here are two men variously related to it. One, very rich but very dull and ignorant, gives a few thousand pounds for it, hangs it on his wall, and hardly looks at it again except when he leads an acquaintance up to it and brags, “That is a Turner, or a Brett, or a Millais.” The other—rich or poor does not matter—has only seen it half a dozen times; but he has set himself down before it

and studied it. He is familiar with the story it tells, and it is full of pleasant and instructive associations to him, reminding him of some great passage in the annals of a people, and of the various modes in which it has been handled by historians, artists, poets. Or he has travelled through the scene it depicts, and recognizes its very details. And still it is crowded with pleasant or instructive associations for him. Not only can he see more in it than a stranger to the scene, because he knows exactly what to look for and where to look for it; but he recalls the adventures which befell him when he traversed the scene, the emotions it roused in him, the companions he travelled with, the very strangers he met, and all that made the time memorable to him. Now to which of these two men does the picture really *belong*? to the man who has paid for it and neglected it, or to the man who has let it creep into the study of his imagination and become a part of his very mind? In a sense, doubtless, it belongs to them both: in a legal sense to the former, in a spiritual sense to the latter. But which of these two forms is the higher and the more enduring? which ministers most to character and welfare, and which lasts the longest? A fire breaks out; the beautiful picture is consumed. And *now* which of these two men has it? Its legal owner has lost it utterly, and the guineas he gave for it; but the spiritual owner has appropriated it for ever: he can recall it when he will; it still hangs in some accessible chamber of his brain; it is still a treasure to him and a joy.

Really and strictly, then, we *possess* just as much, and only as much, as we can appropriate. But—and here we touch a still more important and practical question—on what does the power of appropriation depend? Obviously it depends on the kind of life that is in us, on its volume and quality, on the vigour and variety of its faculties, and on the manner in which these faculties have been trained and developed.

He who has most life in him, and in whom this life has been best cultivated, will infallibly possess himself of most that is really valuable and enduring. He will see farther into men, and be able both to do more for them and to get more from them, than those can do in whom there is less life, or a life less cultivated and accomplished. He will also see farther into the meaning and beauty of the universe, and appropriate them more largely and fully. All events and all changes, all kinships and possessions, will have more to say to him, and will more variously and profoundly minister to his culture and to his welfare. And it is precisely this great blessing which the Lord Jesus offers us. He offers us life of the highest quality, in the richest abundance. He offers us "the power of an endless life." If we truly love and serve Him, He gives us a life that is spiritual, eternal, divine—a life like his own, and one with his own.

Let us remember, then, what that life did in and for Him. He was poor, destitute even ; and yet all things were his. He gently detached Himself from the common kinships of life ; and yet all men were his. All the events of history, all the wonders of nature, all the changes of life, all the occupations and doings of men—He compelled all these to minister to his intellectual and to his spiritual life, and to subserve not his own culture and welfare alone, but also the culture and welfare of the entire world. The divine life that was in Him enabled Him to appropriate the teaching, the beauty, and the inmost value of whatever met his eye, from the flowers of the field and the ways of the streets to the purple heights of mountains and the unfathomable abysses of the human soul.

Might not He, then, who could give the power of his own life to men, securely promise that whatever they might leave or lose in order to lay hold on this life should be returned to them a hundred-fold ? Was there not *in this life* all that

made kinships and possessions valuable or dear to them? Did it not give them the power to make whom and what they would their own? And will it not confer a similar power, and an equal reward, on us? If the mind that was in Christ be in us, are not all things ours by the self-same right by which they were his? and have we not the power to make all that is really good and enduring in them our own?

Let us, then, prize and pursue that which is inward rather than that which is outward, that which is spiritual rather than that which is carnal, that which is eternal rather than that which is temporal. The kingdom of God is within us. All that is really valuable and enduring is within us. Accident may, death will, strip us of all else. We can take nothing out of the world except the life we have developed, the character we have formed. And even while we are in the world, our wealth, our well-being, our enjoyment even, depend not on what we can grasp and gain, but on our power to seize and to profit by the teaching, the beauty, the real hidden worth of all that is around us. With this power, and grace to use it, the very poorest of us may be the richest of men.

Strangely as this truth may sound, it is nevertheless familiar to us even to triteness. The only wonder is that we should ever be perplexed by it, meet it where we may. When one of our own poets sings,—

“ How happy is he born and taught
 That serveth not another's will ;
 Whose armour is his honest thought,
 And simple truth his utmost skill.
 This man is freed from servile bands
 Of hope to rise or fear to fall ;
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all,”

we do not simply admire the ring of his verse ; we feel that

he has given fine expression to a simple yet noble truth.
And yet those closing lines.—

“ Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all,”

are but a paraphrase of Christ's great promise ; they do but put into another form the very truth He taught : viz. that if the true life, the eternal life, be in us, in our utmost poverty we may have all things and abound, receiving the hundred-fold now, in this present time.

XI.

With Persecutions.

ST. MARK X. 30.

THE effect which any great truth produces on our minds depends in large measure, not only on the form into which it is thrown, but also on the place in which we meet with it. If it stand in a connection of thought plainly congruous with itself, we are prepared for it; it presents little difficulty, excites no surprise. But if it suddenly leap out upon us from another level of thought, if we meet it where we had not looked for it, it not only takes us by surprise, but, presenting itself so unexpectedly and abruptly, it is apt to seem even more difficult than it really is.

Thus, for example, when we read in the Gospel that, for all we leave or lose for Christ's sake and that we may be true to the principles we have learned from Him, we shall receive a hundred-fold in this present life, most of us are at first taken by surprise; we are perplexed by a statement which hardly seems to accord with the commonest facts of human experience. Yet when we meet with this same truth in certain of our own poets, and in connections of thought which have prepared us to take, and to appreciate, their meaning, we are neither surprised by it nor perplexed. When they tell us that he who serveth not another's will, whose only armour is his honest thought, while simple truth

is his utmost skill, is not only set free from the servile bands of hope to rise or fear to fall, but is also—

“Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all,”

we do not stagger at their doctrine; we rather confess that they have worthily expressed an obvious and accepted truth. Yet the truth they teach is the very truth Christ taught: viz. that to be true to our convictions at all risks and all costs is great gain; that to do right in scorn of consequence is the way to possess ourselves of all that makes life valuable to us; that for whatever we sacrifice for righteousness' sake we receive a hundred-fold even in this present time.

So, again, I suppose no man ever came on these two words, “with persecutions,” without receiving a mental jolt or shock. When we are perusing the long list of gifts and treasures with which Christ promises to reward as many as endure losses and make sacrifices for the sake of truth and righteousness—as houses and lands, brethren and sisters, father and mother, wife and children—it surprises and perplexes us to find “persecutions” in the list. Are persecutions, then, to be reckoned among our treasures? Are we to account the very trials and losses we endure in the service of Christ as part of the reward which He confers on us for serving Him? And yet, when we encounter the very same truth in other forms and other connections of thought, it does not perplex or distress us. When the most musical of living poets exhorts us to follow truth at all hazards; when he affirms that whatever we suffer and lose in this pursuit will contribute to form in us a high and noble character; when he bids us stretch through the years a hand ‘to catch the far-off interest’ of our tears, and assures us that, if we are true to love and duty, we shall find in loss itself “a gain to match,” we admit the truth of his thought

as well as admire the beauty of the form in which he has expressed it. Yet, after all, what has he taught us save that which Christ taught? and why should the truth, except for its unexpectedness, sound so difficult and forbidding from the lips of our Lord, and yet be so easy and welcome from the lips of a poet who learned it from Him?

The fact is that this phrase, "with persecutions," should present no difficulty to any reflective reader of the New Testament. It is but an abrupt and condensed expression of a principle which pervades the whole structure of the Christian Scriptures, a principle so frequently iterated and reiterated by our Lord and his Apostles, that it must be reckoned among the very rudiments of the Faith. I need not quote many passages in proof of this assertion, since a few will serve to suggest many more.

Among the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, then, we find this; "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake;" and, again, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." St. James echoes the teaching of his Master and ours, his Brother and ours, when he writes, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials," and pronounces him blessed "that endureth trial," since, when he is proved by trial and approved, "he shall receive the crown of life." St. Peter echoes it when he writes, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye;" and St. Paul when he bids us "rejoice in tribulation also," and invites us, by his own example, to "count all things but loss that we may win Christ and be found in him."

"With persecutions," therefore, does not stand alone: it is but a brief and abrupt expression of a pervading principle, of one of the first principles, of the Faith. What that principle implies, and how it may be vindicated and brought

home to us, we shall discover if we examine with care any one of the passages I have just cited. Let us take "the beatitude," and ask Christ to be his own interpreter.

In the Beatitudes, then, our Lord, like other great teachers, raises and answers the question, "What is man's chief end or good?" Like the philosophers of Greece, too, He places our chief good, not in that which is outward, but in that which is inward; not in anything that a man has or can get, but in what a man *is*—in the qualities and dispositions of the soul. The first element of blessedness, He says, is *poverty of spirit*, an inward sense of unworthiness and emptiness, which prompts us to expect nothing from ourselves, but to look for all from Heaven. But when we are thus freed from the self-dependence and self-conceit which would hinder the incoming of Divine truth and grace, we are not to be content with that whereunto we have attained; we are to *mourn* over this inward emptiness, to be sorry and ashamed that we have fallen so low and have lost so much. If we are thus conscious that we are unable to satisfy the vast desires of the soul, and are sincerely mourning over our incapacity and emptiness, we shall be of a *meek*, teachable, and receptive spirit. Nay, more, we shall be devoured with an intense craving, a *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, a sacred inextinguishable longing to become right in our relations to God and man. As this craving is met, we shall grow *merciful*—gentle and compassionate—in our judgment of our neighbours, making the most generous allowance for the emptiness and weakness from which we ourselves are only being delivered by the grace of God. This kindly consideration for others will react on the heart that feels it, making it *pure*, and set it on *making peace*, on bringing into our neighbours' hearts the peace with God and man of which we have been permitted to taste.

Now if we thus connect the beatitudes pronounced on

the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, we see that our Lord is laying down the lines of a very high and noble character ; and that He places our chief good, our blessedness, in attaining the several virtues and graces of which He speaks. But what is any grace or virtue worth *until it is tried*, and has stood the trial ? An untried grace, what Milton calls “ a cloistered and unbreathed virtue,” any quality or excellence of character which has not been put to the test, is one of which we ourselves can never feel sure. It is by use and exercise, by enduring hardship and encountering trial, that we at once assure ourselves that any virtue or grace has become ours, that we give the world assurance of it, and that this virtue or grace is trained, developed, brought to perfection. What wonder, then, that our Lord crowns the beatitudes He had pronounced on the distinctive virtues and graces of the Christian character with a blessing on the trials by which they are put to the proof, by which they are breathed, exercised, confirmed ? The list would have been incomplete without this. Our gifts and blessings would have lacked the last perfecting touch had not the trials by which they are tested and approved been included among them. “ With persecutions,” is a necessary and noble part of our reward as servants of righteousness, since it is by these tribulations that the various elements of the Christian character are fused and welded into a compact impregnable unity. What do *we* think of a man who will risk nothing, and sacrifice nothing, for his principles, and that a noble and righteous character may be unfolded within him ? And why should *Christ* think better of him than we do ? No man can account himself faithful and true until he has been tried. The world calls no man faithful and true until he has been tried, and has borne the trial well. And, therefore, the “ persecutions ”

which try us, which put our principles and convictions to the proof, may be justly reckoned among our chief blessings.

The fact is that, wherea's we too often account a man blessed if he is exempted from trials, our Lord and his Apostles account him blessed only when he can meet the most searching trials and surmount them. They find "a man's chief good and market of his time," not in the number and variety of the enjoyments he can secure, but in the formation of a high and noble character. And whom does even the world itself esteem to be men of noble character save those who have achieved great and difficult tasks, who have braved much and sacrificed much for the sake of some great cause, for the defence and furtherance of some neglected truth, who have endured hardship and suffering, defeat and misery, with an unbroken and dauntless spirit? *Hence*, because of its bearing on character, which is a man's chief possession both in this world and in that which is to come, Christ and his servants have ever taught men to value the trials and sufferings of this present life, to find joy in them because they find good in them. St. James, for example, bids us "count it all joy when we fall into divers trials;" but why? "Because the trying of our faith worketh patience," and if patience be allowed its perfect work in us, we shall become perfect and complete, lacking nothing. With him too, therefore, trial is good, because it forms character and helps to bring it to perfection. St. Paul, again, bids us "rejoice in tribulation;" but why? Because "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hopefulness." So that he, like Christ, like James, thinks trial good for us because it helps to form a noble and complete character in us.

Now the Christian ideal of human life may not be agreeable to us; but we must not therefore deny that it is the Christian ideal, nor wonder that "persecutions" are counted

among the blessings of a good man by those who place this ideal before us. We may shrink from it ; in our undue love of ease or success or pleasure, we may decline to make any resolute stand, or to risk any grave loss, for the sake of truth, principle, duty ; but we must not, for we cannot honestly, deny that the Christian ideal of character is one which the world has always revered and admired ; we must not and cannot deny that the only men whom we ourselves recognize as truly great are those who have lost or risked much in order that they might bear witness to neglected or unpopular truths, or that they might serve some good cause against which the prejudices or interests or passions of their neighbours were enlisted ; in short, men " of an incorrigible and *losing* honesty." In art, in politics, in civil strife, in war, as well as in the Church and in our homes, the men and women whose fame is purest and highest are precisely those who have been the champions of what seemed a losing cause, who have sacrificed their personal interests and ease to the public interest and welfare, who have borne great sufferings with meekness and great losses and defeats with courage, who have loved those who had done little to deserve their love, who have given up all else that they held dear to succour and save the lost, the outcast, the wronged, the miserable, the vile. And can any man complain that Christ calls him, too, *to be great?* to tread the very path which those whom he most admires took before him, by taking which they won his admiration? If not, let no man complain that among the gifts guaranteed to him by the word of Christ are the losses and tribulations by the faithful endurance of which they were made great.

But it may be thought that "persecutions," at least in the original sense of the word, are no longer among the trials to which men expose themselves by loyalty to the truths and commandments of Christ. Even if they are not, still "per-

secutions" were only a form which the trials of those who followed Him in darker times assumed; the forms which our trials take may be quite as keen and penetrating. But is it true that those who follow Christ honestly and resolutely are exempt from "persecutions" even now? I doubt it. No man, indeed, or at least no man in England can now be adjudged to the prison or the axe, to the halter or the stake, simply because he believes in Christ; no, not even though he should think out his creed for himself. But to be exposed to the hatred, the suspicion, the contempt of our fellows is the very sting of persecution. And of those who faithfully follow Christ there are not many who escape this. To call and profess ourselves Christians may provoke nothing more or worse than a smile and a gibe even from those who are most dominated by the law and spirit of this present world. But if any man act out his confession, if he carry Christian principles into his trade or profession, if he shew a regard for the claims and interests of his neighbours even when they clash with his own; if he insist on getting honest work and paying fair wages; if he will not give in to sharp measures and lying labels, or the customary adulteration of goods by the intermixture of baser matters; if he will tell the truth even when it tells against him; if, in brief, he will be scrupulously upright, generous, considerate, will he suffer no loss and awaken no hostility? Will those with whom he has business relations utter no complaint, think no scorn, take no advantage of him? Impossible! Even now no man can be true to Christ, no man can act on Christian principles even in the world which calls itself Christian, without having to pay for it, without exciting much suspicion and resentment and contempt. Even those who profit by his "weakness" will despise him for it. But there is this great comfort for us, if we thus expose ourselves to the contempt and hostility of the world:

Christ regards, and we may regard, these "persecutions" as benedictions. They are the trials which put our principles to the proof; and, by proving, strengthen and confirm them. If they are endured with patience and courage and good-humour, they help to form in us that pure and lofty ideal of character which Christ at once commended, exemplified, and demanded. We are not to be pitied for them, therefore; but rather to be congratulated on them. Because they help to make us perfect, they are part of the "hundred-fold" with which our Lord has promised to reward us even in this present time.

The persecutions of primitive times came at least as much from *the Church*—*i.e.* the Jewish Church—as from the world. Does the Church still persecute those who follow Christ? If we consider how the case stands here in England, we can hardly deny it. Do those who claim in a special sense to be Churchmen never look down with contempt and dislike on their Nonconformist neighbours? Do they never suspect their motives, their sincerity, or even their very right to the Christian name? And the Nonconformists in their turn, do they entertain no suspicion of Churchmen, no ill-will toward them, no resentment of the superiority they assume? Do they feel no surprise when they find certain members of the Church to be as simple, as sincere, as devout as themselves? Do they never suspect its worship of formality, or hint that its ministers serve for hire, not for love? But if suspicion, dislike, hostility, be the very sting of persecution, can we say that in the Christian Church in England there is no persecution, whether its members conform or nonconform?

If, again, any man think himself into a conviction at variance with the popular creed, he will find many staunch friends to stand by him, no doubt; but will he incur no suspicion, no dislike, no unjust and tyrannous rebuke even

from the authorities of the Church and from those who take a law from their lips? But suspicion and dislike are of the very essence of persecution ; and so long as any man suffers, save from the weight of argument, for religious opinions honestly and thoughtfully framed, we cannot say that persecution has ceased even in the very Church itself. But to all who suffer from the tyranny of the Church we may say, " Be of good courage. Your trials are putting you to the proof, and shewing of what stuff you are made. To suffer, to make sacrifices, for a principle is the way both to get that principle more deeply wrought into your own soul, and to win acceptance for it at last even from those who now oppose it. Such 'persecutions' are blessings, if they be patiently endured. They are all in 'the hundred-fold' which Christ promised you, and which you are even now already beginning to receive."

Finally, as the years pass, and our relations with men multiply, and we look more searchingly behind the fair out-sides of life, if our faith grows more settled and calm, trials are apt to accumulate upon us. Of those whom we love some pass away from us, and some fall into lingering sicknesses ; some disappoint the fond hopes we had cherished of them, and others suffer much that is good and admirable in them to be blighted by a secret vice, or propensity, which threatens to be their ruin ; cares of business and domestic cares throng in upon us ; men who have claims on us push their claims vehemently and offensively ; our health declines, perhaps, or we grow conscious that the spring and elasticity of earlier days are gone, and that all tasks are harder to us, and all burdens heavier to be borne. There are times when one feels as though his heart were turned into a kind of hospital, or asylum, with a sick-bed for this neighbour, and another for that, until the whole heart is taken up with cares and solitudes, and the strain grows well-nigh intolerable.

If this be our experience—as at some time it is the experience of most kindly and Christian men—yet why should we complain? This, like every other trial, is Christ's gift to us; it is part of the reward He bestows on them that are his. We have served Him in easier tasks; and now He honours us by asking us to serve Him in a task that is harder. We have met the common tests; and now He applies a still severer test, that, being tried to the full, we may also be blessed to the full. When we thank Him for having called us into his service, and say that for aught we have done for Him we will ask for no reward except that we may serve Him still, and better,—do we mean what we say? Very well, then; in giving us harder tasks and trials more severe and searching, He is but taking us at our word, and giving us the very reward we have asked. Before we complain that life grows heavier to us, and that so many and such exorbitant demands are made on us, let us remember Him who had room in his heart for every man that breathed, and grace for as many as were sick, and strength for as many as were weak, and comfort for all who mourned. Do we not crave and pray to be like Him? And how can we become like Him who learned obedience and was made perfect by the things which He suffered, unless we partake his sufferings for others, unless we bear our trials, whatever they may be, with a patient and a cheerful heart?

We do not escape our trials by grieving over them; but we may subdue and conquer them by taking them as Christ's gifts to us, as tests of our strength and obedience, and tests designed not simply to shew what manner of spirit we are of, but also to raise and invigorate our spirits by exercising them. It is easy to be cheerful in fine weather and when all things go to our mind; but give me the man who can be cheerful in foul weather and when all things seem to go against him. He is a true man, a man indeed;

that is to say, he is a true follower of "the best Man who e'er wore earth about Him."

A clear alternative is before us, therefore. We cannot evade the inevitable burdens and sorrows of life ; but we may either sink under them, or rise through and above them. We may take them as wrongs, as undeserved intolerable calamities, and resent them ; or we may say of every trial which comes to us, "This is the gift of Christ. Because it is one of my trials, it is also one of my treasures. It comes both to put me to the proof, and to make me better than I am. I must play the man, therefore. I must shew that I am equal to all things, through Christ who strengthens me."

It is recorded that, about a hundred years ago, there occurred in America a day so gloomy and overcast that it is still known as "*the dark day*," the darkest for a hundred years. The legislature of Connecticut was in session, and its members were so stricken with terror by the awful and unaccountable gloom that many of them supposed the day of judgment was at hand, and proposed that the session should break up. But an old Puritan (Davenport, of Stamford) stood up in the darkness and wild confusion, and said that, if the last day *had* come, he wished to be found in his place, doing his duty, and quietly moved that the candles be lit, and the House proceed with the business in hand. We cannot but admire a man of so constant and brave a spirit. Let us imitate him, then, for he breathed the very spirit of Christ ; and whatever dark day or "day of judgment" may come to us, let us set ourselves stedfastly to do the duty and to bear the burden of the time ; for so our heaviest trials, since they will do most to strengthen, establish, and ennoble our character, will prove to be our choicest and most enduring blessings.

XII.

In the Regeneration.

ST. MATTHEW XIX. 27-29.

AS there are tarns in the mountains, and those not always the largest, so deep that their bottom has never been sounded, so there are passages in the Bible, and these not always the longest, whose depths we can never exhaust. Unfathomable scriptures, incomprehensible scriptures we may well call them ; and that not merely because they present great difficulties, but mainly because they are so full and hold so much. Such a scripture is the passage before us. We have already glanced at the *hundred-fold* reward which it promises, now in this time, to as many as follow Christ at all risks and all costs ; and of the “*with persecutions*” by which that reward is conditioned, and of which it forms part ; and we now pass on to the words, “*in the regeneration,*” which yield a theme for meditation so vast, so suggestive, so quick with the inspirations of hope, that we cannot expect to sound its depths. Let us at least stoop once more, as we pass by, and sip of its living water.

And, first of all, what do the words mean? What is that which is here called “*the regeneration*”?

The Regeneration is the name of an age, an epoch ; and of an age which is to immediately succeed that in which we now live. When we try to conceive of duration, limited and

endless duration, we commonly divide it into time and eternity—a very neat, logical, and exhaustive division. And yet this conception, as commonly held, is utterly misleading. If we analyse it, we find that most persons have in their minds the image of a straight line, which may be indefinitely extended at either end ; the central part they call “time ;” the left-hand extension of it they call “the past eternity,” and the right-hand extension of it “the eternity to come.” Thus they both detach time from eternity, and cut eternity itself in two, pronouncing that which is endless to have ends. A far truer conception would be to imagine eternity as a vast circle, and time as a shifting point included within it, surrounded on all sides by an unbroken circumference ; always remembering, however, that from this moving point of time influences may emanate which, for us at least, will tinge and colour the whole circle of eternity.

Our ordinary conception, whether of time or of eternity, is unscriptural, as well as illogical. For the Scriptures teach us, first, that time, so far from being an unbroken line, is broken into epochs, or ages, in each one of which some counsel of the Divine Will is wrought out ; thus, for example, it speaks of “ages that are past” and of “ages to come ;” nay, even of “the age of ages,” *i.e.* of the one great age which includes all others, of the immense period in which the will of God concerning man as he is at present conditioned will be revealed and accomplished. And, again, whereas we think of eternity as commencing when we die, or at furthest when the present order of the world shall terminate, the Scriptures speak of eternity as both before and beyond all ages, as encircling and interpenetrating them all ; they teach us that there are ages, or epochs, of time, or dispensations of Divine providence and grace, which will only commence after the present order of this world shall have been brought to an end.

With special emphasis the New Testament reveals an age beyond the present age, the next in succession to this, in which the life of man will be lifted to a higher power, tried and tested by a new discipline ; an age in which all things shall be made new, in which Christ shall come in his glorified body as He once came in the body of his humiliation, and take to Himself his great power and reign on the earth ; an age previous to that eternal age in which Christ, having brought all enemies to his feet, shall deliver the kingdom to the Father, in order that God may be all in all. This age is variously described as that of the new heaven and the new earth, as "the restitution of all things," as "the resurrection," and as "the regeneration."

And of all the names given it in Holy Writ, perhaps the most beautiful and expressive is the Regeneration : for this name implies a cosmical renewal, a re-generation of the universe, a re-creation of all things in heaven and in earth. It implies, not simply that all things will be restored to their pristine beauty and perfection, but that a new and higher *spirit* will be infused into them, that a diviner energy will animate and pervade them all ; in short, it implies that a change will pass on the human race and on the whole universe similar, but superior, to that which passes on us now when we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, when we are born again, born from above. In the regeneration of individual men we have our best aid to an intelligent apprehension of what is meant by *the* Regeneration, the regeneration of the universe.

What, then, is the change which passes on us, personally, when we are regenerated, when we become new creatures in Christ Jesus ? That change, briefly expressed, amounts to this—that by the influence of the Spirit of all grace that which is spiritual in us is raised to its due and lawful supremacy over all which is merely carnal and temporal in us.

We are so quickened that our old love of self-indulgence, our former lusts for pleasure and gain, our deference to the world and the world's law, if they do not wholly pass away, are nevertheless subordinated to our craving for spiritual knowledge, power, gifts. If we are truly regenerate, we care more for the grace of God than for the favour of men; we lay hold on eternal life and relax our grasp on the mere life of the senses. Christ becomes our ideal of perfect manhood, and we try to become men in Him. Success in business, in art, in politics, ease and prosperity in any of our earthly relations, no longer stand first with us. Our chief endeavour is to become good, wise, kind, by faithfully following the example of Christ, and by possessing ourselves of the spirit which animated Him. We are resolved and prepared to sacrifice any interest, any habit, any affection even, which would impair our fidelity to the principles we have learned from Him. We welcome any loss or suffering by which we are disciplined in righteousness and charity. If there is anything which we must let go in order to retain our hope of becoming perfect men in Him, we let it go, however reluctantly and sadly. All this is included in giving the supremacy to that which is spiritual in our nature; all this, therefore, is included in the ideal which the regenerate set before them, and toward which they are always striving, however imperfectly they attain it.

Now even *this* new birth involves a new creation. To the regenerate man there is granted a new heaven and a new earth even in this present time. Not, indeed, that any physical change passes on the physical universe, making it a different thing for him to what it is for the unregenerate; but that his relation to it is changed, his standard of judgment, his sense of its meaning, his measure and estimate of its worth. For him the universe is no longer a vast complex of mysterious forces working out into varied but orderly results; it is also a revelation of the character and will of

God, his Father. For him man's life is no longer only the long result of climatic and social influences modified by the bias and temperament he inherits from his forefathers ; it is instinct with a tender gracious Providence which so portions out his lot as to secure his true and ultimate welfare. As he studies the past, what most attracts and impresses him is no longer the wars of kings, nor the triumphs of art, nor even the social and political changes by which men have won their way to an ordered freedom, or are still pressing on toward it ; not these things in themselves and for their own sake attract him most, but the signs he discovers in them that God is conducting the education and development of the world, leading it on to that final goal of good which lies beyond the range of mortal vision. As he looks around him, he, who was once engaged by the motion, splendour, and variety of the world, and eagerly competed with his fellows for the prizes of their ambition, now sees an infinite worth in much which they still despise, and pursues an aim too high and distant for them so much as to perceive. In short, throughout the whole range of human experience and thought, that which is invisible, moral, spiritual, lays its spell upon him ; that which he most cherishes and esteems is represented to him by such words as virtue, duty, faith, love, religion. Are not all things *new* to such a one as this ? Does he not walk beneath a new heaven and on a new earth, when all that heaven and earth contain are so differently adjusted and related to his spirit ?

Well, this process of regeneration, with which happily so many of us are familiar, will help us to conceive the main features of the coming age, to picture to ourselves the kind of life which will obtain in the Regeneration.

The first and most natural conception to which it conducts us is, that this happy spiritualizing change, which has only been begun in us here, will there be completed, carried on

to its perfection. We shall become *new men*—new, and yet the same. All that now impedes the development of a high and noble character in us, whether it reside in our inward nature or our outward conditions, will be removed. This mortal will put on immortality, this corruptible incorruption. The “natural body,” which in so many and subtle ways hampers the motion and growth of the soul, will be exchanged for “the spiritual body;” for a body, that is, sweetly and harmoniously attempered to the faculties and energies, the virtues and graces, of the spirit which inhabits it, a body exquisitely attuned to spiritual harmonies and visions of heavenly beauty, a body whose organs will be as receptive and pliant to all the perceptions, influences, motions of faith, hope, charity, as the eye now is to the impact of light or the ear to the concord of sweet sounds. And so also the hard and hindering conditions amid which we live—the folly, the vanity, the greed, the aversion to things spiritual, the passionate and exhausting pursuit of gain, position, power, enjoyment, which, so long as they are exhibited by our neighbours, are constant sources of temptation to us, and perpetually drag us down from any height of character we have painfully attained—all these will pass away; they will be exchanged for the fellowship of kindred minds, for the society of “spiritual” intelligences, for the companionship and sympathy and aid of the good, the wise, the pure. In the new heaven and the new earth righteousness is to dwell; and hence all that now tempts and saddens and degrades us will cease any more to vex and afflict us. No noble thought, no pure emotion will then be suppressed for lack of quick and instant sympathy: no heroic task, no labour of devotion, of thought, of service and self-sacrifice will be resigned for want whether of inward power or of outward furtherance. All our conditions, often so unfavourable here and now to spiritual growth and excellence, will there

be propitious to the development of that which is highest in us and best. And is not this a prospect to fire the soul? to kindle in it the fervours of a holy ambition, an unconquerable hope? To possess a body that shall no longer clog and impede the spirit, but help and further it; and to dwell in conditions favourable to the pursuit of wisdom, goodness, perfection—does not this include all that we most deeply crave?

But even yet the prospect is not complete. For as to the regenerate man old things pass away, and all things become new by being newly related and adjusted to him, so, in the Regeneration, we are promised a heaven and an earth absolutely new. Then, so at least the prophets both of the Old and the New Testaments assure us, the regeneration, commenced in the spirits of men, is to spread and extend to the physical universe, to infuse a new force and life and spirit into it; so that in very deed all things shall become new, and the whole creation shall be redeemed from its subjection to vanity and corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Science standing wrapt in perplexity and astonishment before the mysteries of the origin of matter, of force, of life, of thought; and Philosophy standing no less perplexed and astonished before the mysteries of pain, destruction, death, and the origin and function of evil, have this for their last word for us: that in all probability, the visible universe is only a manifestation in time and space, “a manifold phenomenon” of the *unseen* universe; that within and behind all that we see there lies a spiritual universe in which are hidden the causes of this great natural scheme and order amid which we live; that by “the dissipation of energy” it is very certain that this physical universe must sooner or later come to an end, and that, when it does come to an end, the forces and energies which compose and sustain it will be found to have been reabsorbed by the un-

seen spiritual universe from which it sprang. That is to say, Science and Philosophy are at last tending to the conclusion which Christ announced eighteen centuries ago, viz., that the origin of the material universe is purely spiritual; that all which is merely or grossly material will one day pass away; and that then there will come "the regeneration," some more spiritual and perfect manifestation of the Creative energy, in which there will be none of the defects and hindrances that inhere in all that is physical and temporal. In short, the invisible will shine through the visible, the eternal through the temporal, the real through the phenomenal. But all this, which we find it so hard to think out and express, and which Science and Philosophy have taken so long to reach and formulate, St. John beheld in vision, and has expressed for us in words as simple as they are stately and impressive: "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. . . . And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. . . . And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*"

We gain a second suggestion as to the kind of life we may look for in the Regeneration, a suggestion of its infinite variety, if we glance at some other words of this great promise. "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The first and happiest thought which occurs to any reflective reader of this verse is that in the coming age we shall be under the immediate rule of the Son of Man. By the very title He assumes—Son of Man—our Lord reminds us of what He was and did when He came to dwell

among us in great humility ; how pure He was, yet how tender ; how righteous, and yet how kind. And surely it should fill us with pleasure and hope to learn that, in the Regeneration, we are to see Him whom we have so often longed to see, and to see this gentle righteous Man seated on the throne of the universe ; that we are to be under the sway of his sceptre and his spirit. Fallen and sinful as the world is, I verily believe that, if it had to elect a universal King to-day, it would elect the man Christ Jesus, finding no rival, no peer, to Him even in those who stand highest above their fellows. It were much to be visibly ruled by Him here and now ; to feel that our whole life, social, commercial, political, were governed and controlled by Him, and not only our religious life—that He sat on the throne of the world as well as on the throne of our hearts. But what must it be, what of high and noble blessedness is involved in the mere thought of our being subjects of the risen and glorified Son of Man *in the regeneration*, when the renewal of our spirits shall be perfected, when they shall no longer be thwarted and oppressed by this mortal frame, with its weaknesses and biasses toward evil, and when all our fellow-subjects shall be at least as high in spiritual character and attainment as ourselves ! We might well sigh impatiently for the coming of that day, if God had not taught us that we can only reach and enjoy it as we pass with patience and fidelity through the days which lead from this to that.

The reign of the Son of Man will give that unity to our coming life without which progress is impossible ; but for progress, for growth, we need variety as well as unity ; and the variety of our coming life is indicated by the promise made to the Twelve that, in the Regeneration, they should be kings with Christ, kings under Christ, judging and ruling the twelve tribes of the true Israel. Of course this language is figurative, and its details must not be pressed

too far. But from all we know of Peter and James, John and Paul, and the rest of "the glorious company," we should at least admit that they excel the princes and kings of the earth who now rule over us, and that it would be well for us to live in an empire the several provinces of which were ruled by them. And even if we cannot positively affirm that the provinces of the coming spiritual kingdom will be dominated by the spirits of these twelve elect men, and that we shall be permitted to pass from province to province, and to learn what each of these ruling spirits can teach us, we may surely infer from the promise of Christ that in his kingdom an immense variety of spiritual forces and influences will be employed, of all of which we may take the benefit; that men of every kind of spiritual character and in every stage of spiritual development will find in it that which exactly ministers to their condition, their tastes, their needs; so that for each and for all there shall be enough and to spare. Nothing less than this, but much more, is implied in the promise that we shall all be under one King, and shall yet enjoy the ministry of many kings; that while Christ rules over all, and his spirit dominates all, He will also rule through the men who of all men are most venerable to us and most dear.

So far as this we go, but no farther; but is not this far enough? Does not this prospect content us? Is it not enough, if only we hold it stedfastly before our minds, to raise us above the temptations and allurements of the flesh, the world, and the devil? Dare we risk this great and noble inheritance in order to secure the gratification of a moment, to pander to that which is lowest in us and worst?

We *may* risk, we may even *lose* it; for only the regenerate can hope to share in the blessedness of the Regeneration. The work of renewal must be begun now, if it is to be completed then. If any of us should pass out of this present

age unrenewed in the spirit of our minds, it is impossible to foresee exactly what will befall us in "the age to come," and still less in "the age of the ages." But the very best we can even hope for is that, as we have failed to profit by the discipline of this age, painful and severe as it often is, we shall be exposed to a still severer discipline in the age to come, and, meantime, must inevitably lose the blessedness and glory of the Regeneration. There can be no clear hope for any man until by some means, through some discipline, he has been taught to put that which is spiritual in him first, and to value it most. We should not suffer half we do suffer even here, were we to yield to the gentler discipline of the Divine grace, and to let the Spirit make us spiritual men. What we may have to suffer in the unknown future, under what stern discipline we may be brought, if when we leave this world we are still carnal in our purposes and motives and aims, it is not for us to conjecture, and God forbid that we should ever know. It is our duty, rather, to dwell on the dignity and blessedness of those who walk after the Spirit, who honestly love truth and goodness and serviceableness above all the gauds of time both in this age and in the next, and thus to rouse ourselves to lay hold upon eternal life; that so, when the Son of Man shall sit down in the throne of his glory, we may be glorified together with Him.

XIII.

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

But many first shall be last, and last first.—ST. MATT. XIX. 30.

So shall the last be first, and the first last.—ST. MATT. XX. 16.

BETWEEN these two sentences lies the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. Except the parable of the Unjust Steward, no parable has, I think, more perplexed the Commentators, none has been more copiously or variously expounded. Volumes have been written on it; and some of them might have been spared had their authors noted the obvious fact that this Parable opens and closes with a saying about the first becoming last and the last first, and must therefore have been intended to illustrate that saying. Let us, then, bear that fact well in mind. We may be sure that in these two sentences, or, rather, in this repeated sentence, we have the key to the Parable,—the key which ought to fit into all its wards, or the Lord Jesus would neither have laid it so conveniently to our hands, nor have so emphatically called our attention to it.

And there are difficulties enough in the Parable; we need not create them: though some of its supposed difficulties are rather in the minds of its Expositors than in the Parable itself. Thus, for example, some of the Commentators find it hard to understand how labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, members of Christ's Church, should turn an envious eye on any reward allotted to their brethren, and venture to murmur at the inequity of his awards. But, surely, if,

instead of dealing with ideal men, we take counsel of our own hearts, we must be very conscious that it is no strange thing for the servants of Christ to grudge and complain when their brethren are preferred before them, or even to murmur that the Lord's ways are not equal. It is the apparent inequality of his providence which makes the problem of our life, just as it is the apparent inequality of his dealings with the Labourers in the Vineyard which makes the problem of this parable. As we read it, we instinctively sympathize with those who had borne the heat and burden of the day. It puzzles us, as it puzzled them, to see why those who had only worked a single hour in the cool of the evening should be put on a level with the weary men who had laboured through the oppressive fervours of noon and borne the brunt of the toil. It *ought* to puzzle us; for, after charity, there is nothing in us more evidently of God than that deep sense of justice which resents whatever is unfair and inequitable. Nor is the wrong done to this sense of justice at all atoned by the vindication of his conduct which the lord of the vineyard addresses to his dissatisfied labourers. Indeed, to conceive of God as saying, "May I not do as I will with mine own?" or, "Simply because I will, I will do unto these last as unto the first," is but a new shock to our sense of justice, to our faith in the equity of his rule. We have been taught to conceive of Him as actuated by love, not by caprice; as rewarding our service according to a law divinely just, and not according to the uncertain impulses of an arbitrary self-will. Those who find a key to Life and Providence in what they call "the Divine *Sovereignty*," those who believe that of his own will God has elected a few to be saved and doomed the many to perdition, and that He is as truly glorified in the damnation of the many as in the salvation of the few,—they, of course, find no difficulty in the Parable. A penny more or

less goes for nothing with them. But *we*, who believe that God loves all men, and that Christ died for all men, and that the Holy Ghost will have all men to be saved,—we cannot hear this naked assertion of the Divine Sovereignty without perplexity and amazement. We believe in God's justice, and that his justice is part of his love. To hear *Him* say, "I shall do as I will with mine own," or, "I shall bestow the rewards of my grace as I please," cuts our deepest convictions against the grain. "*He* cannot be less just than we are," we say; "He must be far more just: and, therefore, there must be a meaning in the words which we have not fathomed, a meaning in harmony with our loftiest conceptions of his character."

I fully believe that there is such a meaning; and I will try so to bring it out as to solve the difficulties which this Parable presents.

But, first of all, let me say a word or two on the Parable itself, and on its harmony with Oriental customs and Oriental modes of thought.

That the lord of the vineyard should go out, at different hours of the day into the market, and find men waiting to be hired and prepared for the labours of husbandry, is in strict accordance with Eastern habits. In Persia, to this day, bands of peasants go before sunrise, spade in hand, to the market, and wait to be hired for work in the neighbouring fields and gardens. Like the Labourers in the Parable, they lounge about till they are hired, and are, of course, very glad when their turn comes. Even that touch about "a penny" a day is historically and locally accurate. The "penny" of our English Version stands for the silver denarius of Rome, which, in our Lord's time, was the common currency in Judea. This denarius was a common, though a liberal, wage for a day's work in the Roman Empire; for, though it was only worth between sevenpence and eight-

penance of our money, a penny then would buy almost as much as a shilling now : and for a day-labourer seven or eight shillings a day would even now be accounted a handsome wage. Nor is the fact that, at whatever hour they were engaged, all the labourers received an equal wage, without a parallel in the records of the time ; for Josephus tells us that the High-priest Annas gave the workmen employed in repairing or adorning the Temple a whole day's pay even though they only laboured for a single hour.

The spirit of the Parable too, its general conception and tone, are no less consonant with Eastern modes of thought than are its details with Eastern customs. Thus, for instance, there is a Mussulman proverb in which the Jew, the Christian, and the Mohammedan are likened to three bands of labourers hired at three different periods of the day,—at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour. When the evening came, the last-hired—*i.e.* the Mohammedans—received twice as much as the other two. The Jews and Christians murmur, saying, “ Lord, thou hast given two carats to these, and only one to us.” But the Lord replies, “ Have I done thee any wrong ? ” They answer, “ No.” “ Then learn,” continues the lord, “ that the other is an overflowing of my grace ! ” So, again, the Talmud tells a similar story of a celebrated rabbi who died at a very early age. The story runs thus. “ To what was Rabbi Bon Bar Chaija like ? To a king who hired many labourers, among whom there was one who performed his task extraordinarily well. What did the king ? He took him aside, and walked with him to and fro. When even was come, those labourers came that they might receive their hire ; and he (the king) gave him (the favoured servant) a complete hire with the rest. But the labourers murmured, saying, ‘ We have worked hard all day, and this man only two hours ; yet he hath received as much as we.’ The king saith to them, ‘ He hath done more in those two hours than you

in the whole day.' So Rabbi Bon plied the Law more in eight-and-twenty years than another in a hundred years."

These legends have their value, for they shew us, they make us feel that, in uttering his Parable, the Lord Jesus was appealing to customs and was using modes of thought familiar to Oriental and Jewish races. Those who heard Him would readily enter into his meaning. Probably *they* found in the Parable none of the difficulties by which we are perplexed.

Two very ingenious, but, as I think, inaccurate, solutions of these difficulties are worth a moment's attention. The main difficulty of the Parable is, of course, the apparent injustice of giving all the Labourers the same wage. And to escape this difficulty some of our ablest Expositors have assumed either that those who were first called grew slack and careless, or that the last called (like Rabbi Bon) displayed so extraordinary a diligence that in one hour they did as much as those who had been in the Vineyard all day : just, for example, as St. Paul, though the last called of the apostles, laboured more abundantly than them all.

To this interpretation, however, there is one fatal objection. If all the Labourers had done an equal stroke of work, how is it that the Lord of the Vineyard fails to urge so obvious and so complete a vindication of his conduct? Evidently he endeavours to justify himself. When, therefore, his justice was called in question, why did not "the goodman of the house" meet his impugnors with the unanswerable reply, "Although you were first in the vineyard you have done no more work than those who came last; and as these have done as much, it is but fair that they should receive as much, as you." Instead of taking this tone, however, he falls back on his contract with them, and on his power to do what he liked with his own. His very defence implies that the last-called had *not* done as much as the first-called, although he chose to give them as much.

Another ingenious interpretation turns on the various kinds and values of the Roman denarius. There were the brass, the silver, and the gold denarius : the double, the treble, the fourfold. So, in the heavenly kingdom, in the service of God, if there is one reward for all—eternal life,—there are nevertheless many values in this one reward : the “life” varies in vigour, in volume, in capacity and culture.

But the objection fatal to the previous interpretation is also fatal to this. True and beautiful as the thought is in itself, we have no hint of it in the Parable. We have hints which point in an opposite direction. If the wage, though nominally the same, was really different, why did not “the goodman” bid the complaining labourers look at their penny, mark that theirs was a gold penny, while that of those taken on at midday was a silver penny, and that of those called in the afternoon was but a brass penny? With so complete and unanswerable a defence at his command, it is simply inconceivable that he should have fallen back on his contract and his right to do what he would with his own.

We must admit, then, that there was at least an apparent injustice in his dealings. We must admit that those who were really first were put on a level with the last, and that those who were really last were put on a level with the first. We must admit that those who had done most work received no higher wage than those who had done least. In fine, we must admit the inequality of treatment, and learn, if we can, how it is to be explained and justified.

In the whole Bible there is probably no more unfortunate and maladroit arrangement than that by which Chapters xix. and xx. of this Gospel are divided the one from the other. If our Translators had made one chapter of them, or had included the first sixteen verses of Chap. xx. in Chap. xix., half the misapprehensions of this Parable might have been prevented. The connection is so obvious, and so important,

that it ought never to have been broken. Mark what it is, and how it helps us.

In Chap. xix. we have the story of the rich Young Man whom Jesus loved. He comes, with every gesture of courtesy and deference, to ask the Good Master what he must do to inherit eternal life. Despite the temptations of luxury, he is pure; despite the temptations of wealth and saintly reputation, he is humble, modest, dissatisfied with that whereunto he has attained, eagerly stretching forth to things before. Not content with mere salvation, he asks counsels of perfection. Christ gives him what he asks: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." For the moment the test is too severe. Amiable, modest, with a heart set on eternal realities, the young man, cursed with great possessions, cannot all at once give them up. He goes away sorrowful. And Christ is sorrowful at his going away, and begins to make excuse for him. Turning to his disciples He tells them how hard it is for *rich* men to enter the heavenly kingdom. Forgetting for the instant that *he* had not been drawn back from Christ by great possessions, thinking only of the contrast between himself and the young ruler, Peter cries, "Master, *we* have left all and followed Thee! What shall we have therefor?" It is easy to conceive how this boast and question must have jarred on the heart of Christ. He was full of pity for the young man who had won his love, and who loved Him, though as yet he could not leave all for Him. And to see that Peter, instead of sharing his pity, instead of being moved with regret for a man who had had so heavy a trial to meet, was pluming himself on his superior virtue; to hear him exalting himself over the modest, refined, meditative ruler who had just gone away with scalding tears of shame at his own weakness,—this, we may be sure, was hard for Christ to bear. For He loved Peter as well as the

Young Ruler, and would mourn over his coarseness and selfishness. Yet with what infinite grace He responds to the boastful appeal and the selfish claim it implied! There is an infinite grace, but also, I think, a little weariness and conscious patience in the words, "No man hath left all for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive manifold more in this present world, and in the world to come life everlasting." Is, then, Peter's selfishness, his lack of sympathy with his Master, his want of pity for the Young Ruler, altogether to escape rebuke? Nay, for that would not be for his good. And so our Lord follows up his gracious promise to all who leave all for Him, with the warning, "*But* there are last who shall be first, and first who shall be last." Then comes the story of some labourers who, though called into the vineyard at the eleventh hour of the day, received an equal wage with those who had been called at the first hour. What did the warning mean but this—that, though Peter and the Eleven had been the first to respond to Christ's call, others might yet be called who would rank before them; that, though they were the first, they might become the last, and were in danger of becoming last so long as they could boast of their superior fidelity or shew a selfish and unloving spirit? To Peter the Warning and the Parable virtually said, "Yes, you have done much and well. You were among the first to enter my service. You have borne the burden and heat of the day, and, when the evening comes, you shall in nowise lose your reward. You shall have your full wage; but you shall have nothing more than your wage if you are selfish and work only for reward, if you plume yourself on having been called before others who have had to stand waiting in the market uncalled, if you are not sorry for them when they sorrowfully leave the market, or decline the Master's call when at last it reaches them."

And there is one possible, and even likely, application of

this warning which cannot fail to be very welcome to us all. *We* love the Young Ruler whom Jesus loved. A rich man yet not spoiled by his wealth, a zealot for the law and yet bent on learning more than the law could teach, a ruler and yet stooping before a peasant, a young man and yet modest and teachable,—we do not think it strange that he found it hard to give up “great possessions” all at once, and to become a penniless homeless wanderer, even that he might become “perfect.” It irks and grieves us to think that *he* should have gone away from Christ. We cannot easily persuade ourselves that he never came back. Nor need we try. In our Lord’s rebuke to Peter, “But there are last who shall yet be first,” we have at least a hint that he who went sorrowfully away came joyfully back. For, surely, he was one of the last who became first in Christ’s regard; or why, as he went away, should Christ begin to speak of late comers who would be as dear as those who came early, and to tell a story of certain labourers who, though they entered the vineyard at the evening hour, took as high a wage as those who came in the early morning hours? To me it seems, I confess, that the Lord Jesus, yearning with love and pity for the sorrowful Young Ruler, was comforting Himself with the thought that he would come back by-and-bye. *That* seems to me the reason why He harps and lingers on the thought so long. First, as the Ruler departs, He says, “Well, well, there are last who yet will be first.” Then He tells the story of the labourers in the vineyard. And, again, when He has told it, He reverts to the thought with which He had started, “*So* shall the last be first, and the first last.” Let us all cherish a good hope for that young man. There is much reason to believe that he now stands very near the Throne.

If we now take the case of St. Peter and the Young Ruler as an illustration of the Parable, we may begin to recognize

its secret equity. Peter is a Galilean, a neighbour of Jesus. He is a poor man, with little to lose or leave. He is of an ardent impulsive temperament, and stands in no fear of change. He is used to a freer kind of thought and life in half-heathenized Galilee than was common in the South. He has heard John the Baptist; he has believed and been baptized by him. He, therefore, accepts John for a prophet, and looks for the advent of the Messiah. And one day John says to him, "Behold the Messiah whom you expect." Peter follows the Nazarene to his house, enters it, talks with Him, finds that he is in the presence of One who can read him through and through, and speak to his inmost needs as never man spake before. *This*, he feels, is, this must be, the Christ for whose coming he has looked and longed and prayed. And, after a while, he leaves all—boat, home, wife—to follow Jesus. It was a sublime act of faith. Let us, who take our life so easily, never dream of depreciating the sacrifice Peter made. It was a great sacrifice for *him*; it would have been too great for many of us. But now look at the Young Ruler. He is of Judea, not of Galilee. He is rich, not poor. He is young, and life is new to him. He is learnedly educated, and books are dear to him. He occupies a high dignified position; the refinements and amenities of life have grown to be part of his very nature. Probably, too—for the well-to-do Jews married early—he has a young wife and children whom he loves. And suddenly, all at once, without preparation, the very moment he meets Christ, there breaks on him the dreadful demand: "Sell all that thou hast. Leave all you love—possessions, station, books, society, friends, home, wife, children—and become a wanderer and an outcast!" Is it any wonder that he drew back? Were the demand to come to *us*, should not *we* draw back? And if, in after months, on due reflection, he obeyed the call,—was it not just that this

man, with so much to lose, though he came after Peter, who had comparatively little to lose, should receive as high a reward as Peter and stand as near to Christ? Though among the last to come, would it not be fair that he should be reckoned among the very first?

But even this Young Ruler is not a fair illustration of the Parable. However hard it may have been for him to respond to the call, *he had been called* into the vineyard, and for a time had refused to come. But, in the Parable, all the labourers are represented as going into the vineyard as soon as they are called, and as waiting patiently in the market till they are called. What brings them into the market but the hope of work, the hope of hire? And if the Master of the Vineyard does not call them, are these willing labourers, who wait and long for work, to be placed at a disadvantage? When "the goodman of the house" says to those whom he finds still waiting even at the eleventh hour, "What! here all the day idle?" they reply, "No man hath hired us." Are there any words more pathetic than these? Let those answer who have long sought for work, and hungered for it, and not been able to get it. When we read the Parable, partly, I suppose, because we hope that *we* have been in the vineyard a good part of the day, we commonly sympathize with the early-called labourers who, although they have a full day's work and a full day's wage, complain that the later-called receive as much as they. We reserve our pity for *them*. Ought we not, rather, to reserve it for the poor souls who had to waste the best hours of the day in mere waiting, no man hiring them although they were so willing to work, despair gathering about their hearts as the day passed on lest they should have to go home foodless and penniless? *

* This hiring at successive hours in the market is, as I have said, an Oriental custom. But here, in England, I have witnessed similar scenes,

Were not these waiting and unemployed men far more to be pitied than those who had got their work and were earning their bread?

And if, though we have been long at work in God's vineyard, there are myriads who as yet have not been called into it, shall we exult because we are of the happy few? Shall we not rather pity those who still stand in the market, longing for the call which has not reached them? Shall we, when at last the Master calls them, and they come, grudge them an equal wage with us? Shall we not rather rejoice and be exceeding glad in his grace to them and their joy in it? If we do grudge them any good that we enjoy, our want of love will prove that, though among the early-called, we have learned so little by our long service that we deserve to be put among the last; nay, this want of love will shew that we, whose sympathy with Him should have drawn us nearest to Him, have *put ourselves* at the farthest remove from Him. To grudge the grace He shews our neighbours is to demonstrate that we have received his grace in vain.

and they are among the most miserable and pathetic I recall. In the Docks at London there is a labour-yard, to which men flock in hundreds and thousands by eight o'clock in the morning, on the chance of earning half-a-crown by a heavy day's toil. The foreman comes into the yard, hour by hour, as more men are wanted, to call them on. I have seen them, when work was slack, stand about in the piercing cold, or in pouring rain, all the day through. And when, late in the day, a foreman came to take on perhaps a score of men, who at most would earn a shilling apiece, I have seen hundreds of these poor wretches—some of them reduced scholars and gentlemen—crowd round him, begging even for that pittance, and crying, "For God's sake, take me, sir; I am starving:" or, "Take me, I have a wife and six children with not a crumb to eat."

XIV.

The First Last, and the Last First.

But many first shall be last ; and last, first.—ST. MATT. XIX. 30.
 So shall the last be first ; and the first, last.—ST. MATT. XX. 16.

THE Parable which lies between these two sentences, and of which they are the key, is confessedly one of the most difficult of the New Testament Scriptures. Here are men hired, some at six o'clock in the morning, some at nine o'clock, some at twelve, some at three, some even at five ; and yet when paytime comes, at six o'clock in the evening, they all receive the same wage. Instinctively we feel that that is not fair ; we feel that those who had borne the burden and heat of the day ought to have been better paid than those who entered the vineyard only in the cool of the evening. Nor is the matter mended when, to vindicate his conduct, the goodman of the house begins to talk of his right to do what he will with his own, and to declare that it is his will and pleasure to put the last on an equality with, or even before, the first. Such a vindication seems only a new wrong. There is no grace, no equity in it, but only caprice, self-will, and the assertion of an authority beyond control. We do not know how to attribute such conduct, or such a defence of his conduct, to the God whom we believe to be absolutely just and full of grace.

Obviously, then, the Parable is hard to be understood. Many of its difficulties, however, are of our own making. It

is because we divorce it from its context, because we do not study it in its connections, that we often miss the clue to its meaning. If we mark the occasion which gave rise to the Parable, if, moreover, we divest ourselves of theological bias and the incumbrance of technical modes of thought, and bring our plain common sense to bear on the several features of the story, many at least of its difficulties will disappear.

The circumstances which moved our Lord to utter this Parable were these. A Young Ruler—rich, learned, and of dignified position, yet modest, humble, sincere—had come to Jesus, to ask Him how he might win eternal life. The Lord Jesus bade him, if he would enter into life, keep the commandments. This demand the Ruler was able to say that he had met. He *had* kept the commandments. And Jesus, *looking* on him, and seeing, I suppose, that on the whole he had been as good as his word, *loved him*. But the Young Ruler, emboldened by the grace and love of Christ, reveals the secret ambition of his heart. Mark how pure and lofty that ambition is. He is not content with mere life, even though it be life eternal; he longs to become perfect, perfect in all his relations to God and man. And, now, the Lord Jesus makes an unexpected and terrible demand on him. So high and pure an ambition as his can only be attained at the cost of utter self-sacrifice. Jesus Himself was “made perfect through suffering.” There is no other road to perfection. And, therefore, if he would be perfect, the Ruler must part with his great possessions; he must leave parents, wife, houses, lands, books, position, and become a wanderer and a dependant. It was a dreadful demand to make on a young, wealthy, learned man; and all the more dreadful because it was sudden and unexpected. For, in all probability, the Ruler anticipated nothing more than that he should receive a new and austerer rule of life—that he would be urged to a profounder study of the Law, or a more rigid

attendance on the duties of religion. To hear that he must voluntarily become poor and homeless, that he must part with all he prized and loved, to follow One who had not where to lay his head, *must* have taken him by surprise. In his surprise and consternation he finds himself unable to meet the rigorous demand. He goes away sorrowful—sorrowful, not simply because he discovers himself to be more attached to his great possessions than he had thought, but also because he has put himself in a false position, because, after confessing his ambition to become perfect, he finds perfection beyond his reach. But if *he* was sorrowful as he went away, can we suppose that Jesus, who loved him, was not sorrowful to see him go?—that He did not yearn over him, and pity him, and long to bring him back? We may be sure that He did. For, see; the Young Ruler, smitten with shame and grief, has no excuse to offer for himself; but Jesus begins to make excuse for him. Turning to his disciples, He tells them, lest they should judge the Ruler harshly, how hard, how impossible, it is for rich men to enter the kingdom. It is easier for a loaded camel to push through the needle-gate than for a man burdened with wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now if Peter and his brethren had been in sympathy with their Master, if they had shared his loving gracious spirit, what would they have done on hearing Him speak so tenderly of the young man who had just gone away? Would they not—above and before all would not ardent impulsive Peter, have run after him, and told him how sorry the Good Master was to lose him, and have besought him to come back? Instead of shewing a spirit of love and tenderness, they breathe a selfish arrogant spirit. “*We* have left all for Thee,” cries Peter: “what shall we have therefor?” and no words could have more conclusively shown his lack of sympathy with his Master. Christ was mourning that a man of a nature so lovable, with a heart bent toward the loftiest aims, should

miss the high mark of perfection ; and Peter breaks in on his tender wistful reverie with, "Never mind *him*, Lord. *He* won't come. But *we*, we have left all to follow Thee !" In his rough blundering way no doubt Peter meant to console his Master, to remind Him that, if some went away from Him, others were ready to cleave to Him ; but his very attempt at consolation must have been a new wound to Christ. For He loved Peter as well as the Ruler ; and now He must rouse Himself to teach Peter what manner of spirit he was of. To Peter's rude arrogant demand, "What shall we have therefor ?" the Lord Jesus replies with infinite grace, "You shall have a hundred-fold now, and by-and-bye life everlasting." But to this gracious promise He appends both a warning and a parable : the warning, "*But* many first shall be last, and last, first ;" and the parable that of the Labourers in the Vineyard. It is as though He had said to Peter, "You and your brethren have indeed left all to follow me. Have no fear for your reward. You shall receive it to the uttermost farthing. You were the first to enter the vineyard, and you work in it as well as you know how. When the evening comes you shall have a full day's wage. But have you no pity for those who are not called, or for those who, being called, do not come? no pity even for those who, before they can come, have so much more to leave than you? *Are* you thinking only of reward, only of how much you may get by serving me? Well, you shall have even more than you hope. But there are many not called yet who will come to me by-and-bye, and these may shew a nobler spirit. They may serve from love, and not because it is in the bond. And these last,—will it not be just that they should be put on a level with you, or even be preferred before you, if you retain your mercenary and servile temper? Nay, this Young Ruler whom I love, and who, because I love him, may yet be drawn into my service,—though he come long after you, yet if he leave

more that he may come, and shew more love when he has come, even 'unto this last' I will give as unto you, and more than to you: and so the last will be first, and the first last."

Here, then, we come on a thought which solves many of the difficulties of the Parable. As thus: to be called into the vineyard is to be called into the service of God. What is the main task of that service? It is that we learn to trust in the love of God, to respond to it, and from love to Him to shew love for men. Now we may have given ourselves early in life to the religious duties and tasks in which this love for God and man is commonly expressed. We may have been diligent, stedfast, faithful in discharging them. But while giving good heed to our tasks and duties we may have failed to cultivate the spirit of loving dependence on God and of fervent charity towards our brethren. Like Peter, we may have thought too much of our bond, our contract with God, and have discharged our duty mainly with an eye to reward. And, like him, besides being very ready to ask, "What shall we have therefor?" we may be both hasty and harsh in our judgment of those who with many more difficulties to encounter than we had to meet, and much more to sacrifice, find it hard to give themselves with entire devotion to the service of God, and so come late into the field. Like the first-called Labourers of the Parable, we may agree with the Master for so much a day; and when paytime comes, we may be very forward to complain, although the contract on which we used to lay such stress has been faithfully kept, that some of our brethren have received a great deal more than we think they have earned. And if we *are* of this spirit, mark what is that we have done. We have discharged, perhaps, the duties prescribed by love; we may not have shirked any of our tasks even during the heat of the day: but, nevertheless, we have failed in our main work. For all these tasks and duties were appointed us

mainly that we might grow in love to God and man : and we love God so little that we complain of his dealings with us ; we love men so little that we grudge them what God gives them. Is it not meet, then, if we are of this impious though dutiful spirit—the very spirit of the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son,—is it not meet that, though of the first to enter the service of God, we should be ranked among the last in his household? *We have put ourselves last* by our arrogance, our jealousy, our servility. We shall get our wage ; but how can we get more than our wage until we *love* God and man as well as serve them?

But, now, let us look at the Parable itself, and mark one or two of its phrases and details, that we may still further learn how it sets forth, not the arbitrary self-will, but the evenhanded justice of God,—not the caprice of the King, but the laws of the heavenly kingdom.

And, first of all, let us emphasize *the contract* made with the first-called labourers. The householder “went out as soon as it was morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. *And having agreed with the labourers for a denar a day*, he sent them into the vineyard.” Now a silver denar, or denarius, was a liberal day’s wage throughout the Roman empire, amounting in purchasing power to more than a crown of our English money, perhaps even to three half-crowns. But the point we have to note is that when the householder went into the market at six o’clock in the morning, and found some labourers waiting about to be hired, *he agreed with them*—so much pay for so many hours’ work. There was, in short, a bargain struck, after “How much will you give?” and “How much do you want?” and the other chit-chat of the market. We must lay stress on this contract ; for, as we read on, we find that no bargain of the sort is made afterwards. At the third hour—nine o’clock—the householder takes on more men : but to them he simply

promises "Whatsoever is right I will give you," and they go their way into the vineyard without demur, not haggling for terms, trusting simply to his justice or his generosity. At twelve o'clock, at three o'clock, even at five o'clock in the evening, he takes more men on: but in no case have we any hint of a bargain, nor does he even promise "I will give you whatsoever is right." The labourers are eager for work on any terms; and there is something, I suppose, in the householder's face and tones which is a promise in itself.

Let us mark another point. All through the day, so often as he wants men, the goodman of the house goes into the market, and finds labourers waiting and ready to do any honest work on any honest terms. They respond to his call, for they are there in the hope that they may be called. In the East (as I have already said) this custom still obtains. Before dawn the labourers go into the market, spade on shoulder, and stand there on hire; and are very glad, since their bread depends on their wage, to be summoned to field or vineyard. And there is one very pathetic word in the Parable. When the goodman goes into the market at five o'clock in the evening, a few patient peasants are still hanging about in the hope of work, though their chance of work and wage for that day is well-nigh gone. He says to them, "What, ye here idle all the day?" and they reply, "Sir, no man hath hired us." Surely it was hard on these poor fellows to be rated as idlers when they had been looking for work all day, and their hearts were growing sick because no work had come. And in their "No man hath hired us" there is a sigh of weariness, there is a patient sadness and dignity, which will touch the hearts of all who have known what it is to long for work and find none. That they were not lounging about at home, nor strolling about the streets, but standing in the market where men were hired, was a sufficient proof

that they wanted work, and would have been glad to get it long before the eleventh hour if they could. We commonly sympathize with the first-called labourers, and feel, as they felt, that it was unjust to give the later-called the same wage with them. But ought we not, rather, to sympathize with these last-comers, and feel that it was unjust, or at least very hard on them, that they were not called as soon as the others? To me it seems that these poor fellows who, longing for work, had had to wait about for eleven hours out of the twelve, their hearts sinking within them as the day closed in and there was still no money earned to buy bread for their wives and children, were far more to be pitied than those who had been happily at work all day long and had no fear for their daily bread. So, also, apparently, thought the goodman of the house: and hence "to these last he gave as unto the first."

Now these two points—first, the contract with the morning labourers, and second, the "No man hath hired us" of the evening labourers—are among the main points of the Parable; and, therefore, they must have a spiritual counterpart: they must find an illustration in "the kingdom of heaven." Perhaps we may best ascertain their spiritual bearing and intention by considering the case of the Jews and the Gentiles. God called the Jews to his service *first*, in the very dawn of time; and, afterwards, the Gentiles—much later in the day. The Jews entered into a covenant, or contract, with Him. They would keep so many laws, offer so many sacrifices, say so many prayers, on condition that God blessed them above all other nations of the earth. And taking them as a whole, excepting only a few lofty and spiritual souls, the Jews, who had agreed with the Master for so much a day before they entered the vineyard, did their work in the spirit of hirelings. The ruling motive of their service was the reward. So long as

they got their wage, they were therewith content. When they heard that God had shown his grace to the Gentiles also, and that these late-comers into the vineyard were to be put on equal terms with them, they were offended. They murmured and complained, "We have borne the heat of noon, and the weight, the burden, of the toil. These have wrought but one hour, and that in the cool of the evening, yet Thou hast made them equal unto us." They had all that was stipulated for in their bond, but with this they were not content. God kept, and more than kept, his covenant with them; but it was intolerable to them that the uncovenanted Gentiles should be placed on an equality of privilege and favour with them. And rather than continue to work with the late-called Gentiles, they left the vineyard. Here, then, were first who became last. Was it unjust that they should be among the last? Was it *God* who put them last, or *themselves*? Surely it was they themselves, for they might have remained among the first: did not St. Paul, although a Hebrew of the Hebrews, become the foremost Apostle of the Christian Church?

Compare with theirs the case of the Gentiles. *They* made no contract with God. They trusted in Him that He would do whatsoever was right. They were waiting, longing, for his call. Christ, the Rejected of Israel, was the Desire of the Nations. It was no fault of theirs that they had not entered his service before. They were willing to work; they were standing to be hired; they made no stipulation about wages. It used not to be customary, indeed, to conceive of the Pagan nations of antiquity as crying out for the living God. Men used to think of them as hating God and refusing to serve Him. At last, however, we are beginning to learn from Christ that He is the true Light because He enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world. We are beginning to learn from St. Paul

that the nations which walked in darkness were groping after God, if haply they might find Him. We are beginning to learn from the scholars of our own day that the deepest thing in the ancient literatures is the cry for God, that all that is true and beautiful in them was inspired by the selfsame Spirit by whom we are taught. We are beginning to learn that there is, and was, no difference, in this respect, between Jew and Gentile, that the same Lord is over all men, and is rich unto all that call upon Him; that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted by Him. If any should ask the Gentile races, "Why stood ye idle so long?" they might well reply, "Because no man hired us. We were there in the market, waiting for the Divine call, crying for God and groping after Him. But how could we find Him till He revealed Himself to us, or enter his service until He taught us what his service was and bade us enter it?" *We* may plead for them, as St. Paul does plead—"How should they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how should they believe on Him of whom they had not heard? And how should they hear without a preacher? And how should the preachers preach until they were sent?"

Here, then, in the Gentiles, we have last who became first, just as in the Jews we have first who became last. Was there any injustice in calling the Gentiles from the market in which they waited with longing hearts, into the vineyard in which they rejoiced to work? If now that they are in the vineyard they serve as sons, not as slaves, from love and not for hire; if they love their fellow-labourers and grudge them no good that befalls them; if they love even the Jews who have left the vineyard and try to win them back,—is it not meet and right that, though the last called, they should be ranked among the first in God's service, and before those who were first but have become

last? Is the parable difficult *now*? Can we not see the Divine equity which animates it, and rejoice that even unto these last God grants the same grace as unto those who were earlier called?

“Yes,” it may be said, “now that the parable is explained, we see what it means; we see that God is just in putting first last and last first.” But how dull and unspiritual we must have been in our thoughts, my brethren, to need any explanation, when the truest and best explanation should have been suggested by our own hearts! Is not the service of God *its own reward*, that we should always be thinking of how we are to be paid for it, or comparing our wage with our neighbour’s, and grudging that he should have as much as, or more than, we? If we recall the greatest happiness we have ever known, the purest and deepest, do we not find that it sprang from denying ourselves that we might do the will of God and minister to the wants of men? But if the work be itself a reward, if it be our highest good and blessedness, if it would still be the best thing we could have even though there were no paytime coming,—is it not both silly and base of us to lay much stress on our wage? The Parable should not have puzzled us: it could not have puzzled us if our minds were habitually illuminated by the truths we most surely believe. The first-called labourers had the longest spell of work: *that* was their true dignity and blessedness and reward, had they but known it; and that they should complain because those who had had less work got an equal wage, only proves that they were selfish and greedy and unspiritual. And if *we* were not unspiritual in our thoughts, we should have been able to say, the very moment the problem of the Parable was put before us: “Why, of course, the work was the best wage; and it was but fair that those who had least of the work should have most of

the pay." We should have said, "Instead of grumbling that the late-called were put on equal terms with them, those who had spent the whole day of life in the Divine service, if they had known their true blessedness, would have prayed for their fellows, 'Lord, as these have had less of Thy service, let them have more of Thy favour, and a larger reward than we who have already enjoyed the best reward.'"

If, then, we at last understand this parable, let us beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, of the spirit which inspired Peter's demand, "We have followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" of the selfishness and envy which moved the labourers in the vineyard to complain of the goodman's grace to those who had so long waited for work in vain. Although we are Gentiles, we may be of a Jewish heart. It is not *all* the last, but only some of them, who shall be first. Whether early-called or late-called, so soon as we begin to boast of our superior privileges or our superior fidelity, so long as we are not content with rendering any service to God or man unless it is seen and approved both of men and of God, so long as our service is mainly animated by the hope of reward, or we grudge any reward or distinction vouchsafed to our brethren, we *are* Jews rather than Gentiles; we are like Peter in his worst mood instead of his best; we are in danger of being among the very last in the household and ministry of faith.

Let us learn that so soon as we begin to suspect, and to depreciate, to criticise and condemn our fellow-servants, so soon as we fail in the charity which thinketh no evil but hopeth all things, and especially the best things, although we may be among the servants of Christ, we lack the spirit of Christ; and although among the first in the Church we are putting ourselves last in the kingdom of heaven. The true lesson of the Parable is the old lesson,

the old conclusion of faith and charity. Instead of being conscious of any service we have rendered,—instead of boasting how much we have done and dwelling in our thoughts on the recognition and reward we ought to receive for it, let us trust that, whatever men may do, God will do whatsoever is right by us, and rejoice that, whatever our wage may be hereafter, here and now we have had the honour and reward of being called into his service. Instead of measuring ourselves against ourselves, or grudging any good that comes to any of our brethren, let us love all men, especially the household of faith, and by sympathy in their joy become partakers of their reward.

XV.

The Shepherds and the Magi at the Cradle of Christ.

A CHRISTMAS HOMILY.

ST. LUKE II. 1-20 ; and ST. MATTHEW II. 1-12.

OF all the facts connected with the birth of the Lord Jesus, the most striking and impressive, those which are narrated in fullest detail and have most affected the popular imagination, are the visit of the Jewish shepherds and the pilgrimage of the Persian magi to the cradle of the newborn King. Taken together, indeed, these two events yield us a welcome prophecy and a most seasonable lesson. For the wise men from the East were the ambassadors and representatives of the heathen races, just as the shepherds of Bethlehem were the ambassadors and representatives of the Hebrew tribes ; and in these two the whole world bent in worship before the Divine Babe whom God had sent, as his Christmas gift, to be both "the light of the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel."

Nor did the shepherds and the magi represent only that temporary division of the world into Jew and Gentile which has passed away. They also represented the two classes of the learned and the simple, into which every race has been divided from the earliest times down to the present day. For now, as always, mental power and culture tell more

decisively on the lot of men than any outward distinction of birth, or place, or wealth. All the educated and gifted men of every land form a class apart—a class in which the poorest member, if he be a deeper scholar or of a loftier genius, takes a higher rank than his competitors, whatever their wealth or social position may be. The men who really tell on the welfare of the world, and live in the history and affection of their kind, are not kings, or nobles, or millionaires ; but those who by force of native genius or by toils of thought sway the minds of men or enlarge the bounds of science. Between these and the ungifted and unlearned a great gulf is fixed ; a gulf which, though not impassable, is, of all the divisions that obtain among men, the most difficult to cross. And, therefore, the fact that the simple unlettered shepherds were not only admitted to the presence of the Child-King, but admitted *before* the learned magi, is all the more welcome and consolatory. For no man, however rude and uncultivated, need despair of following where they lead the way. Not that we are to think of learning and genius as placing men at any disadvantage with God, but that we are to account it just that those who have the fewer gifts and advantages should, if they use them well, go before those who, with ampler advantages and gifts, use them no better than they. If the man who has but two talents so trades with them as to make two more, while the man with five talents only makes three more, surely the former is the better servant of the two, and deserves a larger reward. If by a song of hope and joy, breaking from the darkened skies which overcast his lot, the rude shepherd is led to Christ and the service of Christ, he surely is worthy of at least an equal honour with the studious sage who is drawn into the same service by the teaching of a star.

1. The Shepherd comes first, then, to the cradle of Christ, but the Sage comes too ; the Jew first, but also the Gentile :

the Jewish shepherd led by a song which quickens his devoutest hopes and aspirations, and the Gentile sage by a star, the message of which his science enables him to interpret; but both come to the same point, both join in a common worship. And here, as I said, we have a prophecy, a consolation, and a lesson very pertinent to the time. The prophecy is that, as in his cradle the Lord Jesus received "in a figure" the homage of the entire world, so at last, in happy glorious fact, He will receive the adoration of all kindreds and tribes, drawing all men unto Himself by virtue of his Cross. The consolation is, that even the poorest, the simplest, the least gifted and accomplished, find a welcome from Him, and may take rank among the very first in his kingdom. And the lesson is that, whatever the distinctions which obtain among us elsewhere, we are all one in the service of Christ, and should use our several gifts for each other's good,—the shepherd singing his song to the sage, and the sage telling the story of his star to the wondering shepherd. And are not these the lesson, the comfort, the hope proper to Christmas? Do we not at this even more than at other seasons of the year try to shew good-will to all men? to feel that even the poorest gift and the simplest service are acceptable to God? to believe that, though the world be still perturbed by many evils, out of these evils God will yet evolve a greater good, and bring in a peace which shall be all the sweeter for the discords which have preceded it? It is because we instinctively feel that these lessons and hopes are involved in the story of Christ's birth, even when we have not distinctly thought them out, that we love to think of the Jewish shepherds passing with sandal and crook through the rough village street to find a Babe laid in a cradle as lowly as their own, and of the train of the wise Persian magi, bearing in their caskets imperial gifts to a King above all kings,—the wise men growing

wiser by their worship, and the untutored shepherds more devout.

2. These thoughts of themselves, if we dwelt upon them, might suffice to put our hearts in tune with the time. But, in place of dwelling on them, let us look at the story once more and see what else we may learn from it.

We may learn from it that it is not so much in the number and magnitude of our gifts, as in the use we make of them, that our true welfare and happiness consist. The shepherds were ignorant men, condemned to a life of hard toil and scanty fare, exposed to the fierce heat of the Syrian sun by day, and by night to the keen Syrian frosts. Tied and bound by the claims of their craft, they had few opportunities for joining in the public worship of the Temple, or for listening to the instruction of the Hebrew rabbis; and hence it was, I suppose, that even among a pastoral and agricultural people like the Jews the shepherd was held in some contempt. These shepherds, in common with the whole Jewish race, doubtless cherished the hope of Messiah's advent; but this hope would be somewhat cloudy and indefinite in their minds; it had little real hold on the students of the rival schools of Judea, or on the priests who served the altar, or on the "masters" who were learned in Holy Writ: why, then, should it have much weight with them? Yet at the bidding of the angel they leave their flocks, and hasten to Bethlehem to verify the good tidings he had brought them.

The wise men from the East had, in some sort, even fewer advantages and aids than the shepherds. No direct message from heaven was vouchsafed to them, no song set to a celestial music. They see a new sign in the sky; possibly, that rare and remarkable conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, which, at distant intervals, blend their rays into a brilliant and portentous volume of light. They

believe that the appearance of such a sign in the sky foretells the advent of some great one on the earth. No doubt they had heard of the rooted and wide-spread persuasion which, as we learn from the heathen historians of the time, led all thoughtful and devout souls to look to the East for the coming of a great king and deliverer. They may have met with the Hebrew tradition which affirmed both that this remarkable conjunction of planets had heralded the birth of Moses, and would herald the birth of the Messiah. We can hardly doubt that they possessed the prediction of Balaam, who, like themselves, was a wise man from the East—a priest and an astrologer—and had learned from him to connect the “star that should come out of Jacob” with the new “sceptre that should arise in Israel.” But even if they had all these materials at their command, these aids to a true interpretation of the significance of the new star that burned in their sky, these aids were scattered here and there through the broad field of their studies; and nothing short of the audacity of genius, or the inspiration of the Almighty, could have enabled them to bring together the prediction of Balaam, the Hebrew tradition, the popular presentiment, the appearance of the strange portent in the sky, and to discover the meaning that was common to them all. When they had reached their induction, when they had convinced themselves that the new star predicted the birth of a new king, that induction was only one of many which occupied their thoughts. How easy it would have been for them either to distrust this link in the long chain of argument or that, or to turn to other and not less promising fields of research, or to sit and wait till the conclusion at which they had arrived was confirmed or disproved by news from a far country! How hard it must have been for them to leave the luxuries and honours, and above all the scientific pursuits, of the Persian palace, in order to encounter the toils

and perils of a long hazardous journey, on the mere chance of finding their conclusion verified ! What a noble faith in their scientific induction, or in the inward leading of God, is implied in their encountering so great a risk on so slight a chance of being bettered by it ! For even if their conclusion should be verified, what was "the King of the Jews" to Persians, or they to Him ? Not Columbus himself, the very first to burst into the unknown American seas, was worthy of more honour as he stood with forward look and calm resolute mien among his mutinous crews, than were these wise men with their unconquerable faith in the conclusions of science and the overruling hand of God.

It is very true that God spake to these star-gazers by a star, just as He spake to the shepherds while they were keeping their flocks. It is very true that there is a special force in truths which seem, as it were, to come out of their place, to obtrude themselves upon the narrow round and daily path in which we move. But how easily even that force may be evaded or blunted we all know from our personal experience, and may still further learn from this very story. For example, Herod was a king, and he was told of the birth of a King. The scribes were students of the very Scriptures which predicted the coming of the Messiah ; and they were told that He had come. The scribes and Herod knew all that the shepherds knew, all that the magi knew, and more. They shared in the general expectation of the time. The Hebrew traditions were in their hands and mouths. Balaam's prediction was recorded in their sacred books. They saw the star which shone over Bethlehem, and knew what it was held to mean. They could quote the prophet Micah on the birth-place of the Christ, or hear him quoted, and knew the very village in which they might look for Him. And, besides all this, they had heard the song which the angels sang to the shepherds, for the shepherds had published it abroad ; and

they had talked with the magi whom the star had drawn from their distant home. All that they had seen and heard exactly corresponded with the historic and prophetic records which they studied and taught. And yet, not a single scribe goes with the magi from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, or will so much as walk six miles, with the star to light and the wise men to guide him, in order to verify the fulfilment of a prophecy on which the hopes of the whole nation were based ! Herod, as we learn from St. Matthew, had no doubt that the prophecy was fulfilled. He expressly admits that "the Christ is born." He is only troubled to discover the place and the date of the nativity ; but it is that he may slay the Holy Child wherever he finds Him !

We could have no more impressive illustration of the truth that it is not our gifts, opportunities, advantages, but the use we make of them, on which our welfare depends. On kings and priests of an evil heart all the resources of Heaven are lavished in vain ; while simple shepherds may learn more from a single song than the scribes from the whole canon of Scripture, and wise men may stake more on a mere peradventure than *they* will do on an admitted certainty. And is not this a truth appropriate to the season ? At Christmas we feel it right to break through certain barriers by which we are too commonly separated one from another. At the season in which the Son of God assumed our common humanity, and, by becoming the Brother of all men, made all men brothers, we think with a special kindness of those who have somewhat less than a brother's share in this world's goods. Their outward conditions are not so happy as they should be,—the injustice of man thwarting the bounty of God. He has given enough for all ; but some of us have more than our share, others less. And if we really wish to shew that we love and respect our poorer brethren as we ought, if we wish that they should respect themselves, and not distrust the goodness

of God because of the injustice of man, what thought will be more helpful to us, or to them, than this?—that our standing in the sight of God is determined by what we are, not by what we have ; that those who have less outward advantage may have more inward wealth, that those who are last in gifts may be first in the faithful use of gifts. It is better to be learned than to be unlettered ; it is better to live in large and ample conditions than in narrow and penurious conditions : but the best thing of all is to use whatever we have well, to carry a faithful and kindly heart into our outward conditions whatever they may be. And this the poor unlettered man may do no less than the rich or the wise. We may all stand round the cradle of Christ ; but they stand nearest who come first. There is room for rich and poor, for sage and shepherd and scribe ; but neither our ignorance or our poverty, nor our learning or our wealth, will either give us a place or exclude us from it. There is room for all ; and the place we take depends simply on the use we make of the teaching and gifts and opportunities vouchsafed us.

Even round the cradle of the Holy Child, signs of splendour and majesty mingled with the signs of poverty and lowliness. If his parents were poor, they were of royal blood. If He was “ the seed of the woman,” He was also “ the Son of God.” His birthplace, though a little village, was “ great among the thousands of Judah,” in virtue of noble historic memories and antique predictions. His cradle was a manger ; but wise men worshipped before it and poured royal gifts into the Virgin’s lap. His advent was announced to simple shepherds ; but it was announced by “ a multitude of the heavenly host.” Over the poor stable in which He lay there shone the star of a King. And as in his person and the circumstances of his birth, so also in his Church and service there is room for all the extremes of human condition, for rich and poor, learned and unlearned, bond and free ; nay,

to his eye, all these varieties of outward condition are nothing, and the faithful seeking heart is all.

3. Now here we come on another lesson. If it be true that our place in Christ's service and regard depends on our fidelity in using our gifts rather than on the abundance of our gifts, it is also true that the only genuine fidelity is that which leads us forward and upward.

A fear of that which was new and strange to them may have done quite as much to render the learned scribes of Jerusalem hostile to Christ as the dread that their vices would be rebuked by Him. Like all who study to acquire a technical and formal knowledge of truth, the scribes may have been averse to go beyond the form and limits of truth with which they were familiar ; and, therefore, it may have been harder for them than we sometimes think, to believe that, after they and their fathers had worshipped in the Temple and read the Scriptures in the same way for many centuries, any new and original revelation of truth should be made to them ; that God should speak to men by a new voice, in a new tone, and speak words not to be found in their Scriptures, words even which seemed to make light of their Law and their Temple. We must remember, too, that men to whom religious studies and services are a profession are very apt to become professional, very apt, *i.e.*, to sink into a routine, to defer unduly to use and wont, to think more of phrases and forms than of the spiritual facts and energies they once expressed, and to be startled into instinctive opposition by new and larger expressions of truth, even when these new expressions are only a fair equivalent or a logical development of the old formulas : and, therefore, the scribes may have found it very hard to believe that their old order must give place to new ; that the prophetic words for ever on their lips were at last to become present facts ; that the prayers which they had officially presented for the advent of Messiah, and which had

not been answered for a thousand years, were now to be answered.

Let us make what allowance for them we can, and for the difficulty which men so set and stiff would feel in receiving new and larger expressions of truth. Let us also make what allowance we can for their spiritual descendants, who are no less stiff and obstructive than their fathers. But let us make no allowance for ourselves if we are stiffening into their narrow and formal habit of mind. If we detect in ourselves any tendency to account that we have already attained, that we know all we need to know, and may condemn those who differ from us ; if we do not expect that more light will break out upon us from God's holy word, or shrink from it when it does break out, because we hate the labour of investigation and of adjusting our thoughts afresh,—let us have no mercy on that. It is the very "leaven of the Pharisees." It is the very temper of the scribes who, after teaching all their lives that the Christ was coming, and hearing that He had come, would not walk a few miles to see whether the news was true and the promise fulfilled. Let us, rather, follow the simple shepherds and the wise magi. To them the good tidings announced by the song and the star must have been much more new and strange than to the scribes and the rabbis. But the sages and the shepherds were "men of desires," men who looked before as well as after, men who knew little and were aware of it, or men who knew much and yet accounted that much but little compared with what God had to teach. Let us be followers of them, ever looking for more truth while we walk by the truth we know. And walking in the light we have, it will grow larger and purer ; using the gifts we possess, more will be added unto us.

XVI.

The Omens in Origins.

A HOMILY FOR THE NEW YEAR.

ROMANS XI. 16.

UNDER a figure of speech familiar to the Hebrew mind, St. Paul here expresses a conviction to which he gave frequent utterance. Nor is this conviction, or principle, peculiar to him or to the Hebrew race; in various forms it is found in all the literatures of antiquity. The principle is that *origins are omens*, a principle on which we may fitly meditate as, with some natural awe, we enter on the initial moments of a new year.

If we observe the road on which a man starts, we can give a shrewd guess as to the direction in which he will travel. If we study the words and actions of a child, we can frame a probable conjecture as to the character he will display in after years; for "the child is father to the man." If we consider the race of a group of settlers on an unpeopled shore, the resources of the land on which they have disembarked, its climate, its geology, its physical configuration, we may, if we are wise enough to give its due weight to each element in the problem, forecast what their national characteristics are likely to be and the leading forms of their daily life; we may reasonably say, "They will be mainly an agricultural, or mainly a pastoral, or mainly a

maritime people ; they will subdue the races with which they come into conflict, or they will themselves be subdued, since they are of an inferior strain or lack the power of successful colonization." Or, again, if there come any great revolution of thought, such as that occasioned by the first proclamation of the Gospel in the Roman Empire, or that marvellous excitement of slumbering truths and convictions and energies which we call the Renaissance or the Reformation, from the attitude which each nation in turn assumes toward it we can infer what that nation's future destiny is to be, whether it is to lead the van of human progress with growing vigour, or to lag in the rear until it fall dead or helpless by the wayside. In short, we, like St. Paul, find omens in origins ; we feel that initial moments are critical and sacred moments, that every beginning prophesies of a corresponding end, that the start indicates the goal, that much depends on how we first meet any new influence, how we commence any new period of time or any new sequence of events.

This was St. Paul's general principle, and he here gives it a particular application. Addressing himself to Gentiles, he admits that the Jews seem to have been rejected by God because of their unbelief ; but he argues that, nevertheless, God has not really "cast away the people whom He foreknew," that their part in the history of the world is not played out now that, through them, salvation has come to the Gentiles. He admits their "trespass," their "fall,"—admits that, because they had adjudged themselves unworthy of eternal life, God had turned to other races: but, he argues, if their fall has been the salvation of the world, what will their recovery be ? if their "decrease" has been the wealth of the world, how much more their "increase" ? if their rejection was "the reconciliation" of the world, what shall their reception be but "life from the dead," a resurrection of all the slumbering powers of humanity ?

Nay, more ; of this ultimate reception of the Hebrew race to the Divine favour, its recovery to the path from which it has stumbled and fallen, he finds at least two clear proofs. One is that the good news of salvation had been first of all accepted by Jews ; it was by Jews that the Gospel had been conveyed to the Gentiles : and if the firstfruit be holy, so also must the lump, the mass, the harvest be holy to the Lord. In *this* origin he finds an omen. Because salvation was of the Jews, he infers that it is for the Jews ; because some of them had been the first to receive it, he infers that, in the end, they will all receive it. A second proof, to his mind, of the ultimate recovery of the Hebrew race is, that it sprang from a good and sacred root ; that the fathers and founders of the race had been men whose very blood was impregnated with the audacity of faith, with the love of righteousness, with the craving for spiritual peace. If the root were holy, shall not the branches be holy ? If Abraham were faithful, shall not the seed of Abraham be faithful ? If David, with his singular sweetness of nature, his noble loyalty and devotion, his frank joyousness, and a penitence no less frank and noble,—if David were a man after God's own heart, could those who were "of the stock of David" be altogether alienated from the life of God ? St. Paul will not believe it. His arguments may not carry much weight in the court of logic, but to his humane and generous instincts they are full of weight, as they are to ours. Just as we never cease to hope that the children of good men may come right, and have an ineradicable faith in the virtue of a mother's prayers, so he insists on hoping that the stock of David and the seed of Abraham will be at last recovered to life and peace. Just as we infer that when the finer and loftier spirits of a race have welcomed any new truth, the truth will spread from them to all who are of one blood with them, as the dawn sweeps down the mountains on to the

plains, so he believes that all his brethren will one day welcome the Gospel in which many of them already rejoiced.

If the firstfruit be holy, so also is the harvest. The principle that origins are omens is veiled under a figure drawn from the Hebrew ritual. Consider this figure for a moment.

The Hebrew law of the firstfruits was very wide in its reach and compass. The firstborn of men, cattle, birds; the first yield of every tree, every orchard, every vineyard, every field; the first batch of bread, the first measure of wine; the first hour of the day, the first day of the week, the first week of the year, the first year of seven and of fifty,—all these were holy to the Lord. “Good onset bodes good end,” says Chaucer; and our common proverb affirms, “Well begun is half done.” The principle of these two sayings was embodied in the Hebrew law. Every beginning was held to be sacred; it was hallowed to God, given and devoted to Him; the “onset” was made good that the “end” might be good.

Of the innumerable illustrations of this principle offered by Hebrew life, let us take only two; one from the corn harvest, and the other from the fruit harvest.

The first, from the corn harvest. On the second day of the Paschal Feast the Jews brought the first sheaf cut in their fields, and presented it before the Lord. The sheaf was of barley, and, in later times, was taken from the fields in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. On the eve of the Festival certain deputed members of the Sanhedrin went out into the fields to select and tie together the finest ears they could find. On the following morning these ears of barley were cut with all possible publicity, bound into a sheaf, carried into the Temple, and waved before the altar by the officiating priest. This was the firstfruits; and until this had been offered to God no scythe or sickle could be put into the standing corn. At the Feast of Pentecost, fifty

days afterward, the harvest having now been gathered in, two loaves made of the new flour were also brought to the altar, and, like the Passover sheaf, were waved before the veil which concealed or symbolized the Divine Presence. What did the Jews mean by giving the first and best sheaf to God, and loaves made of the finest of the wheat? By dedicating the first sheaf and the first loaves they meant to dedicate the whole harvest and all their bread to God. If the firstfruit was holy, so also was the lump. Just as here in England, when a landed proprietor shuts up a private road on one day in the year, he claims it on that day in order to assert his right to it on every day; so God claimed the one sheaf to shew that every sheaf was his. *His?* Yes; but in what sense? In a double sense: the harvest was his gift to men, and the harvest was to be consecrated to his service.

In the fruit harvest a similar claim was asserted in a still more dramatic form. When the first and finest fruit had been gathered from bush and tree, from orchard and vineyard, Moses stepped in and said: "Thou shalt take the first of the fruit . . . that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket; and shalt go to the place in which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name." Arrived at the Temple, the Jewish husbandman gave his basket of choice fruit to the officiating priest, saying, "I confess this day unto the Lord thy God that I have come into the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers to give us." Then the priest was to take the basket out of his hand, and to place it on or before the altar, and the husbandman was to recite these words: "A Syrian ready to perish was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation great, mighty, and populous; and the Egyptians evil entreated us and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when

we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. And He hath brought us unto this place, and hath given us this land, a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which Thou, O Lord, hast given us." Having thus confessed that all the pleasant fruits of the earth were the gift of God, and should therefore be devoted to his service, the husbandman was to "worship" before the Lord his God, and to make great mirth, "rejoicing in every good thing which the Lord had given to him and to his house."

These two illustrations will suffice to shew what the intention of the Hebrew law of firstfruits was, that it was meant to excite gratitude and devotion, a thankful acknowledgment that every good gift cometh down from above, and an earnest resolution so to use the gifts of the Divine bounty as to honour and glorify God. Every sheaf was just as much God's as the first sheaf; every basket of fruit was as holy to Him as the basket laid on his altar. And, in like manner, with the firstfruits of time. Every day was as holy as the Sabbath; every year as the year of Jubilee. Special times, special fruits were set apart expressly to kindle a sense of the sacredness of all time, to teach the Jews that the whole product of their toil was sacred. They could have made no greater mistake than to suppose that, because they gave one day to God, they might do what they would on other days; that, because they gave one sheaf or one basket of fruit to Him, they might waste or abuse any other portion of his harvest gifts. The very words they were commanded to utter before the altar reminded them that they were his people at all times and in all places of their habita-

tion,—in Egypt as well as in Palestine, in the fields as well as in the Temple ; and that every sweet fruit and nutritious grain was his gift, and was therefore hallowed to them by the Hand from which it came. If they began the week with Him, it was that they might give the week to Him ; if they began the harvest with Him, it was that they might give the harvest to Him ; if they began life with Him, by being submitted to the rite of circumcision, it was that they might give their life to him. All these origins, or beginnings, were omens. They were to begin well that they might go on well. They were to make “good onset” that they might make “good end.”

And the principle which underlies this Hebrew symbol is wide and deep as human life. It is a principle recognized by all races, in all literatures. So far as we know, there never has been a nation which did not regard the initial events of any sequence, or the beginnings of life, as portentous. To the eye of science the whole sequence of any series of events lies in its commencement, the whole subsequent form of life in the bias it receives at the outset. And, as we know, the unscientific races have always attached a sacred importance to the moment and circumstances of birth, finding omens and prophecies of the future in the conjunction of the planetary bodies, or in special words uttered by the parents, or in whatever remarkable or exceptional occurrence may have attended the nativity: they have always looked for lucky days, or hours, for favourable omens and signs, before they would contract a marriage, start on a perilous journey, embark on a long voyage, give the signal for battle, or commence any other hazardous or momentous enterprise. *We* may have cleansed our minds of the perilous stuff of superstition ; and yet do we not instinctively feel that every origin has its omen, that well begun *is* half done, that to commence any task or enterprise

auspiciously is to secure a hope, and a hope very apt to fulfil itself, of bringing it to a happy close?

Were there need, and did time permit, it would not be difficult to shew on what good grounds of reason this persuasion rests; how, in choosing one task rather than another, we betray our native bent toward it, and are therefore more likely to succeed in it than in other tasks; how, if we begin well, we shew an earnest intention, a vigour, which is very likely to battle with subsequent difficulties and to conduct us triumphantly to the end we have set before us. But there surely can be little need to explain or prove a principle which all the world holds; what we need is to apply rather than to demonstrate it.

“If the firstfruit be holy, so also is the harvest.” If we come of a good stock, we are the more likely to be good men. If we make a fair start, we are the more likely to reach the goal. If we begin life with God, we are the more likely to spend it and to close it with Him. If we devote part of our substance to his service, we are the more likely to hallow all we have and do. If we open a day, or a week, or a year by worshipping Him, we are the more likely to make all its hours worshipful and holy. In all these, as in many other forms, we may state St. Paul’s general principle, and safely leave it to prove itself. But how does it apply specifically to our religious life, to the religious life of Christian and modern times? It applies in many and important ways. For, consider, we dedicate at least one house in every district to God. We dedicate at least one day in every week to his worship. We consecrate at least one meal, the Lord’s Supper, to Him, and hold the bread and the wine sacred to religious uses. What do we mean by giving these firstfruits to God? We mean, if we are wise, to acknowledge that all our days are his gift and should be holy to Him, that every house is a house of God, in which

we should dwell as in his gracious presence, that every meal should be a sacrament at which we eat with Him. "If the firstfruit be holy, so also is the harvest;" and we give God the firstfruit as a pledge that we will use the harvest as for Him, that we will give Him *this* too.

And in this principle, thus applied to our daily life, we have a rebuke of two errors into which men commonly fall. First, there are those who are very scrupulous in their attendance on public worship, their observance of the day they call "the Sabbath," their participation of the Sacramental feast, but who too much forget to what they pledge themselves by these religious acts. They give the firstfruits to God in order to *exempt* the harvest. They pay a certain religious tax, not as those who acknowledge the value and sacredness of law, but as those who would be exonerated from the claims of the law in their daily conduct. They do not feel, or they do not act as if they felt, that they serve God by resting on one day of the week, in order that they may serve Him in the labour of the other six. They do not worship in his house in order to gain strength and grace to live in righteousness and charity at home. They do not sit down with Christ at his table with a view to learn that He is always with them, and that day by day they live not by bread alone, but by a mystic efflux from the Fountain of Life into the wells of their being. Withholding the harvest, they do not really give their firstfruits to God, though they mean to give them; for what can He care for their gifts, if they do not give themselves to Him? What can He care that they cease from their own works for one day, if they cease from them only that they may be quit of his claim on other days? What can He care that they build Him a house, or frequent a house which their neighbours have built for Him, if they do not learn in his house to worship Him in their business and in their homes?

Such men have a radically false conception of God, of duty, of religion. They regard Him as a hard and austere Ruler who must be appeased by taxes, by gifts, by sacrifices, not as a tender though august Father who wants them to do his will that they may be the better and the happier for doing it. Instead of devoting themselves and all they have to Him on the glad inspirations of love, they pay what He demands as an insurance against his anger and the calamities in which it might involve them. Instead of feeling that what they give to Him becomes more truly their own, and longing to give all to Him, they feel as though they *lost* whatever He gained from them, and parted with whatever they gave. The very Jews knew better. They brought their firstfruits to God, and so devoted their whole harvest to Him; but what after all became of harvest and firstfruits? Did God want to take these away from them? He wanted simply to add to the joy of harvest the joy of gratitude and praise, a glad sense of his presence and goodwill. And hence when the Jew brought his firstling lamb, or a sheaf of barley, or a basket of choice fruit, a little of the fat or a handful of grain was flung on the altar, in order to teach him high spiritual truths, or the sheaf and the basket were "waved" before the Holiest of all; and then priest and offerer sat down to a feast, *eating* the lamb, and the corn, and the fruit, taking them as in very deed gifts of the Divine bounty, and making great mirth before the Lord. And the devout husbandman went back to his golden fields and purple vineyards feeling that God was with him, and that God was good; he threshed his corn, and trod his winevat, and took the new wine and the grain to market, and sold them for the best price he could get, knowing through all that he was moving within the circle of Divine law, rejoicing in the Divine presence and benediction, assured that in threshing-floor and winevat and market he was

servicing the Lord no less than when he brought an offering to the Temple. Did *he* lose anything by what he gave to God? Did he not rather gain the true sweetness and the true strength of life?

And this happy temper of devotion, which takes all good gifts as from the immediate hand of God and by a temperate and thankful enjoyment of them devotes them all to Him, is surely not impossible to Christian men. They have possessed and displayed it again and again. When, for example, we are told that the converts of Pentecost “stedfastly addicted themselves to the instruction of the apostles, and to the fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to the times of prayer,” we are also told that “they did eat their bread with gladness and simplicity of heart,” as if this too were an excellence, a virtue, worthy of our admiration. And the more we consider this simple phrase, the more we find in it to touch our imaginations and hearts. It was, or at least to most of us it would have been, very hard bread to eat. For those who ate it were either inhabitants of Jerusalem who had had to “sell their possessions and their goods” in order to furnish the table with food, or they were poor “devout men out of every nation” who were dependent on their brethren. If we had to part with our fields or our furniture to furnish forth a common table, and still more if we had to eat the bread of charity, would it not be a little apt to choke us? Would it not be very admirable of us, and prove a singular beauty of character, if we could eat *such* bread “with gladness and simplicity of heart,” praising God for it?

And some of us can. I have seen—as who has not?—poor men and women sit down to the scantiest fare with hearts quietly and serenely glad, and heard them give thanks to God for his bounty with a tender joy and gratitude which turned the bare chamber into a sanctuary and

the scanty fare into something better than a feast. Do we not all feel that this constant temper of worship, diffused over the whole life and triumphing over the most adverse conditions, is infinitely more acceptable to God than formal acts of worship, and bears an infinitely more persuasive testimony to the reality and power of religion?

These, then, are they who give the harvest to God as well as the firstfruits. But, on the other hand, there are those who, while aiming to give the harvest, withhold the firstfruits; and this is the second error of which I spoke. They say, "We try to devote all our time to God, to live always as in his sight, to see Him in all things and to do his will in all we do. And therefore we do not care much for sacred days, for public worship, for sacraments, nor feel our need of them." But if *they* do not see their need of them, God does. In his judgment it helped the Jews to devote the harvest to Him that they should lay the firstfruits on his altar. In his judgment it helps the Church to consecrate every day, every house, every meal, that its members should set apart one day, one house, one meal as holy to Him. And the general conscience of the world responds to the judgment of God. It sees an omen in every origin; it says, "Good onset bodes good end." To begin the week or the year with worship, with devout remembrance of Christ, with acts of obedience to Divine commands, even though as yet we do not see the full worth of them,—this surely is well; it is an auspicious omen; it is a beginning full of promise. And until we see our friends who a little look down on sacraments and worship and sabbaths attain so high a pitch of virtue as quite to overtop those who value them—which we certainly do not see as yet—it will be wise of us not to neglect any ordinance of the Church, or any aid to holiness which God graciously affords us.

Let us, then, begin this year with God; and may the

omen of this origin be fulfilled in a whole happy new year to us all. May it be a very happy year, even though it should bring us much pain and loss ; for pain is often God's minister for good, and loss is often great gain. We may eat our bread with gladness and sincerity of heart even though we have nothing but bread to eat, and but little of that. And what do we ever crave goods and possessions for, except that we may have a heart sincere and glad? If we can gain the glad heart by losing our goods, will not our very loss be great gain?

Whatever we may forebode, therefore, let us offer the firstfruits of the year to God ; but let us remember that, in the firstfruits, we devote the whole harvest to Him.

XVII.

The Love of Christ.

AN EASTER HOMILY.

ST. MARK XVI. 7; LUKE XXIV. 34; I COR. XV. 5.

ONCE more Easter Sunday points our thoughts to an opened grave, to an opened heaven. Once more the whole world of Nature conspires with the day to fix our thoughts on Him who could not be "holden" in the bonds of death, and on that great uprising in which there lies a prophecy of the general resurrection unto life eternal. For *the world*, at this spring-time, cannot be holden of death; it is rising from its wintry grave; the silence and cold rigours of death are giving place to the quickening warmth and merry choirs of life. The sweet voices of the birds are heard in the land; the cuckoo's mellow horn sounds through woods breaking into bud and leaf; the black hedges are robing themselves in tender delicate greys and greens; and the almond-tree, whose branches were adusk and bare a few days since, is now flushed with rosy blooms. All Nature is rising from death to life, and warmer tides begin to run through our veins, bringing us into accord and sympathy with the world in which we dwell.

The gracious hallowed time speaks to us, through all its changes, both of the past and of the future. It speaks of that joyful day when He arose who is "the Life indeed," and of that great day, more joyful still, when He will prove

Himself "the Resurrection," the day on which old things shall pass away, and all things, even to the solid earth and spacious heavens, shall become new.

To the company of the Apostles the first Easter Sunday was a day of wonders surpassing all the wonders they had known. For the three previous days they had sat in darkness and the shadow of death. They had long hoped that Jesus had been He who should have redeemed Israel. His crucifixion, while Israel was yet unredeemed, defeated their hopes. Their hearts were heavy with sorrow. Their sorrow was sharpened by disappointment. Their disappointment was embittered by shame and self-rebuke. But on the first day of the week, "very early in the morning," a new day dawned upon them, a new hope. The holy women, who had gone while it was yet dark to the sepulchre to embalm a dead Master, met a living Friend, and returned with haste and joy to bring the disciples word of an empty grave and a risen Lord; to remind them that He had foretold his resurrection while He was yet with them; and to invite them to the mountain in Galilee "where He had appointed them."

Of all the apostles, St. Peter, hot and passionate in his repentance as he had been in his sin, had suffered most during those days of self-rebuke and sorrowful discomfiture of hope. He had thought himself so strong, yet proved so weak, boasting that if all others should forsake Christ, yet would not he, and after all denying Him with oaths and curses, that, when Christ was taken away and there seemed no chance of ever atoning for his sin, reproach well-nigh broke his heart. Weeping bitterly, he went out from the apostolic company, as deeming himself no longer worthy to be numbered with them. Except that John, when his new "mother" could spare him, came to relieve his solitude, Peter seems to have been left alone with his sin, all the man, we may well suppose, broken with remorse.

His last word of Christ was a vehement denial of Him ; Christ's first word of him is a message of forgiving love and tenderness. The angels bear the message to the holy women, the women to Simon. Had the heavenly messengers said to the women, "Go tell his disciples *except* Peter," Peter, I suppose, would have been the last to complain. But they are commanded to say, "Go tell my disciples *and* Peter:" Peter, who thinks he has forfeited all claim to be numbered among the disciples, who will not believe that a message addressed to them includes him, tell Peter too ; let him have a special message, a gracious message, that he may know himself forgiven, and that the broken heart may be healed.

But Christ is not content with mere words of forgiveness. Early in the morning Peter receives the message ; but before night the Master Himself stands at his door. Before He appears to the apostolic company, He comes to the penitent apostle who thought himself not worthy to be with them. "He is seen of Cephas ; then of the twelve."

This pathetic interview of the fallen servant with his risen Lord is shrouded in a sacred reserve. But for St. Paul's incidental reference to it when writing to the Corinthians, and the casual exclamation of the Ten recorded by St. Luke, we should not so much as have known that it took place. We can easily imagine with what passionate self-abandonment and contrition the Apostle cast himself at the feet of Christ, and with what gracious and tender kindness Christ reassured and comforted him ; but the Inspired Record lends neither help nor encouragement to such conceptions : and even in imagination perhaps it is better that we should respect the reserve in which the Holy Ghost has left this sacred pathetic incident. Let it be enough for us that we may find in it the revelation of a Love so pure, so enduring, so divine, that our contemplation of it may well deepen the

joy natural to this holy and joyful day. We may learn from it that—

1. *The love of Christ is a love over which death has no power.* Three days—or, as we should reckon, only two days—had passed between the hour in which Peter denied Christ and the hour in which, despite his denial, Christ confessed Peter to be his disciple and friend. During these days the Lord Jesus had passed through the agony of a violent death, and the deeper agony of being made sin for us and a curse. He had also passed through the perfecting ministries of the life which lies in death and beyond it.

If any ask—

“Where wert thou, Master, those three days?”

most of us would probably answer,—

“There lives no record of reply,
Which, telling what it is to die,
Had surely added praise to praise.”

And yet there is some slight record of reply. St. Peter, in a passage which from the very first profoundly struck the imagination of the Church, tells us that, when Jesus was put to death in the flesh, He was quickened in the spirit; and that, “in the spirit,” He went and preached to the spirits in prison who had sometime been unbelieving, as, for instance, in the days of Noah.* In the earliest creeds of the Christian Church—or in an early interpolation of them—we are taught that, between his death and resurrection Jesus “descended into Hades,” to summon all who loved the light to arise and follow Him, to open the kingdom of heaven to all who in any nation had feared God and wrought righteousness, and even to win to penitence and faith those

* 1 Peter iii. 18—20.

who were once impenitent and unbelieving. So that the true answer to the question, "Where was the Master those three days?" is: He was in Hades, despoiling the principalities and powers of evil, calling on Hebrew patriarchs and heathen sages to enter his kingdom, giving an opportunity of repentance to all who "would long ago have repented" had they heard his voice and seen his works, and redeeming to Himself whole kindreds and generations of men. He was trampling Satan under his feet, and opening the prison-house for as many as would be free.

From this Hadean ministry, from this doubtless fruitful ministry, He returned to the earth and re-assumed the body in which He had borne the sin of the world. He had passed through the agonies of dissolution and sacrifice. He had triumphed over him who had the power of death. He had invaded the populous world of the dead, and subdued its tribes into the happy captivity of faith. And yet, though death had wrought strange and perfecting changes in his manhood, He remains unchanged; though He had engaged in an enterprise so arduous and glorious, He has not forgotten the little company of those who trusted in Him, nor any one of them. He remembers and loves them all; He remembers and loves each of them. The angels bear the tidings of his undiminished love to faithful Mary and to faithless Peter, to the women who wept for Him and to the man who wept for himself. Death has not diverted, it has not abated his love. On the morning of his resurrection He thinks of them all, and adapts his words and manifestations to their several ability and need.

His death did not lessen his love; why should *our* death lessen it, or remove us beyond its reach? How can He love us less just when He is drawing us nearer to Himself? Yet how often those who trust Him for life fear Him in death, or, at the best, abate their confidence in Him! How

often we dread to take that "step" which will bring us to his transforming presence! Let us not fear death any more. It is winter rising into spring. It is more, and more perfect, life, a life as much more happily composed as the splendid and far-reaching ministry of the Lord Jesus in the dim Hadean world compared with the sad and hindered ministry of his love on earth. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and is not "the Lord" more and better to us than "the body"?

His death did not change *Him*, nor the delicacy and individuality of his love for each of his friends. And if death did not change the Lord, why should it change *those who die in the Lord*? Why should it separate us from our friends who have gone from us, and of whom we too often think as if they had lost interest in us, and no longer cared for our welfare? The death of Christ is the pattern of the death of all who love Him. If the body decay the spirit is quickened, and all the warm gracious affections which have their home in the spirit. The dead have not ceased to love us; they cannot have lessened in their love for us by growing into the likeness of Him over whose love death had no power.

2. *The love of Christ is a love which does not change as, and because, we change*—Since Peter last walked in friendly converse with his Master, the Lord Jesus had passed through "the great change," the change of death. But had not Peter also changed, and that greatly? He had sinned that sin against love which only the most perfect love can forgive; he had been unfaithful to his Friend. When that Friend stood at his utmost extremity and need, Peter had forsworn Him, denied all knowledge of Him. There are not many who could have forgiven such a sin as that.

And yet Shakspeare, who knew the human heart, in one of his finest sonnets, has taught us that

“Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.”

Even a true human love, he affirms, is like a rock which “looks on tempests, but is never shaken” by them; or like a steadfast star which shines upon “a wandering bark,” and does not shift its place, however often the ship may change its course. And, indeed, so long as love looks for return, so long as it is quick to resent changes and to change with them, it is little more than another name for self-love. The true love, the pure love, is that whose motive is in itself, which is constant in spite of changes and offences, which does not alter with every alteration of its objects, but loves on, forgetting and denying self, that it may still serve them. And this was the love of Christ. It did not resent the change in Peter, but corrected and repaired it. Peter had altered, but Christ did not therefore alter. Peter had removed himself far from Christ, but the love of Christ did not “bend with the remover to remove.” It could look on the tempest—a tempest spitting out oaths and curses—in Peter’s soul, yet meet it with no answering tempest of anger and disavowal. Like a star it shone on the wandering unsteadfast bark of Peter’s faith, its rays as bright, its help as ready, as when the sea was calm and the ship at rest. “Go tell my disciples *and Peter*. Don’t forget *him*, though he forgot both himself and me. Bid *him* come and meet me with the rest.” Nay, because, like the rest, Peter delayed to come, Jesus came to him. “He was seen of Cephas.” “He appeared to Simon.”

If love be not love “which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove,” is not *this* love which does not alter even when it finds a Peter so shamefully altered, which does not remove even though Peter has re-

moved so far away? The love of Christ knows no change. Its motive is in itself, not in us. He loves love, and is love. He cannot deny Himself. And hence those whom He has once loved He loves even to the end.

But though the love of Christ be so tender and so enduring, we cannot sin against it with impunity. Because it is a perfect love, we must not presume upon it. Love can take many forms. It can break the heart as well as heal it. It can be a consuming fire as well as a life-giving sun, burning up the evil growths of the heart that its gracious growths may thrive. They who know the love of God

“dread more
To be forgiven than sinners do to die.”

Nothing is so sad to a gracious heart as to have to come again and again into the presence of the Divine Forgiving Love with the confession of having sinned against it. Nothing is more terrible than to acknowledge to One who will be good and kind, whatever we do, that we are utterly unworthy of his grace. “There is forgiveness with God, *that He may be feared.*” To have hurt a stranger or an enemy is bad enough, but not half so bad as to be continually hurting a constant friend. There is no shame like the shame of having betrayed one who loves us despite our very betrayal. And this was the shame that melted Peter’s heart when the Lord Jesus “appeared” to him—the shame of having denied One whom even his denial could only move to a more gracious confession of him. We are not told what took place at that interview; but we may be very sure of this, that Christ found it much easier to forgive Peter than Peter found it to forgive himself.

3. *The love of Christ is a love which respects the sanctities of personal attachment.*—The risen Jesus saw Peter alone first, then with the other apostles. For Peter had to

retrieve both a public fault and a private personal offence. He had boasted before his brethren, "Though all these should be offended at Thee, yet will not I be offended." Yet, when the other apostles simply fled from Christ, Peter thrice denied Him in open hall. When Jesus rose from the dead He had neither forgotten the presumptuous boast nor the denials which falsified it. That Peter might shew that he was "converted," and publicly atone his public fault, he had to unsay his boast and revoke his denials. Before his brethren Jesus asked him, "Lovest thou me more than these? Do you still hold to your boast?" And the humbled Apostle tacitly withdrew his boast, claiming to love Christ indeed, but no longer claiming to love Him more than others. As he had thrice repeated his denial of Christ so he has thrice to witness this good confession. Thus the public offence was atoned and forgiven. But the private offence, the personal sin against the friendship of the man Christ Jesus, this, no doubt, was confessed and forgiven in the private interview, when Jesus appeared to Simon alone, and before his interview with the apostolic company. Even as it was, Peter was "grieved" that the question, "Lovest thou me?" should be three times repeated; but had there been no previous private interview he might have been grieved beyond all endurance and filled with despair.

Now this gracious adaptation to the individual needs and peculiarities of men does not stand by itself; it is characteristic of Christ. Though his work be very great, and though it be essentially one work, He adopts a different treatment with each of his disciples—a treatment exquisitely adapted to their special make and needs. It is nothing short of wonderful to mark how, with the whole world upon Him, He thinks specially for Peter and for Thomas, for Philip and for John, and adjusts the common truth to their respective exigencies and powers.

This was the method of Christ, but it is not the method of some who profess to follow Christ. There are many who would fain insist on cutting out all our varied and manifold spiritual experiences after one pattern, and that a somewhat coarse and base pattern—those to whom any symptom of character or originality is well-nigh an unpardonable sin. They see no sanctity in the spiritual experiences of the individual soul, but would roughly, or carelessly, or formally intermeddle with our most secret griefs, our most sacred joys. Let us remember, therefore, that even our human love has its reserves, its secrets, and mysteries; that the deeper it is the less voluble it is, and the more carefully hidden from alien or indifferent eyes. And when we meet those unskilful husbandmen, who would fain expose to the glaring eye of day the germs of spiritual life which can only grow in silence and darkness, who would be for ever handling and examining them, and pruning them into correspondence with their poor and base ideal, let us refer them to Christ and the method of Christ. Let us point them to the Good Husbandman and to those open parables of nature which teach the mystery and sanctity and individuality of life; that it springs up we know not how, in a secrecy which no eye can penetrate but the eye of Infinite Love, and after a law whose manifold operations only God can apprehend. If we are true men and women, we cannot but be conscious that the common human nature has taken special and individual forms in us; that if we are like, we are also unlike, each other, and require therefore diversities of spiritual treatment, and must grow up into Christ each after his own kind. If we are wise as well as true, we shall feel that every heart which is a temple of the Holy Ghost is a hallowed place, not to be profaned by every passing foot; and that in this holy temple there is a holiest of all, which only the great High Priest of our confession may enter.

Happily for us, He has respect to the sanctities of our personal make and of our personal attachments to Him, and varies and suits the communications of his truth and grace to our personal temperaments and moods and wants. Just as the genial warmth of spring makes the whole world green and fair and musical, but takes a special form and tint in every wayside flower and weed, and leaves to every bird its distinctive feather and note ; so the love of Christ broods over the whole Church, and wakes it into new and vigorous activity, yet in an infinite variety of character and experience and service, each of which is beautiful in its place and season, and which all blend, not into a wearisome uniformity of outward appearance, but into the sacred and helpful unity of a complex and manifold spiritual life.

XVIII.

The Priests of Baal an Example for Us.

A HOMILY FOR YOUNG MEN.

I KINGS XVIII. 25-29.

IT is a happy event for men when they are compelled to choose decisively between good and evil ; when a clear alternative is distinctly placed before them, all the good on one side and all the evil on the other. Such crises are by no means common, whether in the history of men or of nations. In this life, and for the most part, good and evil are strangely blended ; “the crisis of this world,” which is to separate them for ever, is still far from us—shrouded in the darkness of the distant future. Hence the act of choice is often very hard ; and the wiser we are and the more candid, the more difficult it becomes for us to choose between this political party and that, this church or that, this profession or that, this mode of life or that, so much may be said both for and against each of them. In the course of life we are constantly arriving at places where “the ways meet,” and it is very seldom that our choice is restricted to two ways—the one running straight uphill to the right, the other running straight downhill to the left. As a rule, many ways are, or seem to be, open to us, ways that deviate from each other only by gradual and almost imperceptible curves, ways that cross each other at many points. Most of us have doubtless stood more than once

at these cross-roads of life, perplexed by their number and similarity, studying the well-nigh illegible sign-posts with anxious wistful eyes, wishing that, instead of many roads, there were only two, and that we could make our choice and go on our way without any after-throb of misgiving.

And, indeed, there *are* only two ways ; the narrow uphill road which leads to life, and the broad downward road that leads to death : for though Wisdom has many pleasant peaceful paths, the entrance to them all lies through "the straight gate," and, sooner or later, they all wind into "the narrow road." But the Prince of this World is very busy and very cunning. He breaks up the broad road into many ways, which look narrow enough to be paths of life, though one "wide gate" swings across them all ; and he cuts lanes close beside the entrance to the true way of life which, though for a time they travel in the right direction, gradually sweep round into the road of death—a road which, though it be broad, is always thronged. And thus even the wise are often perplexed in their choice, while the simpler pilgrims are very often beguiled and led astray.

It is well for men, therefore, that crises should come in which they can *see* that there are only two paths open to them, in which the alternative is clear and choice imperative. Such crises do come to men and to nations. In our public history there have been times when our fathers, in our personal history there have been times when we, have had to choose between an evil and a good about which there could be no debate ; times when the usual inter-mixtures of life have been resolved into two ultimate components, and we have been constrained to elect either the one or the other ; when we have had to say, after due deliberation, either, "I choose good, though I should lose by it," or "I will not give up the evil I love, even though I should thereby risk or lose the supreme good."

Such a crisis had come to Israel in the days of Ahab. Three years of drought, and consequent famine, had compelled the men of Israel to ask, "Whose doing is this? And who can undo it? Who is it that has shut up the heavens? Who can send us rain and fruitful seasons? The Jehovah whom we used to worship, or the Baal whose altars now smoke with our sacrifices?" This was their "question of the day," as it is in some form the question of every day. For Jehovah was the God who had given a pure law that restrained the evil passions of men; Baal was simply their own brutal and cruel passions projected into an outward form: and the supreme question for every race, for every man is, "Shall we listen to the voice of our pure and merciful Father in heaven, or shall we let the passions, which He bids us rule, rule us?" Elijah prepares to answer this question for the men of Israel, or, rather, to make them answer it for themselves. There shall be no dubious pondering over many alternatives; the single and ruling alternative of life shall be distinctly placed before them. They shall choose, not one of many paths, but one of two; and in order that the choice may be final and decisive, all the deceptive illusions which confuse men's choice, or beguile them into a wrong choice, shall for the moment be swept away: the one path shall lie all bathed in the warm rich hues of hope, the other all frowning with the terrors of a haunted and threatening darkness.

The Prophet challenges the priests of Baal. They meet on Mount Carmel, its rocky base washed by the blue transparent waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Two altars, and only two, are raised beneath the fierce lurid heaven of drought. A bullock is laid on either altar. And now, "he that answereth by fire, let him be God." The priests of Baal, nearly a thousand strong, rend the air with their shrill invocations. From morning till noon they circle round the

altar in the weird mystic dance by which, after their manner, they raised themselves to the very ecstasy of worship, crying, "O Baal, hear us!" But "there was no voice, nor any that answered." At noon they are lashed into mere frenzy by the fierce, terrible irony of the prophet: "Cry on! cry louder! surely he is a god. But, perchance, he is plunged in thought; or he has stepped aside for a moment; or he has gone on a journey; or he is asleep, and needs to be awaked!" They redouble their cries; for the sun is at its fiercest noon-day heat; and if Baal, the Sun-god, be propitious, surely he will hear them now—hear, and kindle the sacrifice, and scathe the insolent blasphemer who mocks his power. They cut themselves with knives and lancets as they dance and leap, till their blood gushes out on altar and sacrifice. But still there is "no voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard" the blood and tears and mournful despairing cries they lavish on their unheeding god.

The sun sinks toward the west; and then, when their voices die away with the dying day, the solitary Prophet approaches his altar, and the evening stillness is broken by the passionate supplication: "Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, let it be known this day that *thou* art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again to thee." While he was still speaking the answer came. The fire fell from heaven; the sacrifice was consumed. The people fell on their faces, and confessed, "Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah, he is the God!" For that day, at least, while the alternative is so distinct and the proof so clear, they cannot doubt; they acknowledge the Lord to be God, his service the supreme good, and that to depart from Him in order to

follow their own lusts is the worst of ills, the prolific source of all the evils that are in the world.

Now, when the first effect of this impressive story has a little passed off, when our sympathy with the triumph of the one man over the many, of truth over error, has somewhat abated, we must all, I think, have felt a little pity for the defeated priests, for those eight hundred and fifty men whose blood ran and reddened along the dry bed of the brook Kishon till the approaching rainstorm came and swept it clean. For they were *men* as well as priests, and men with some very noble and spiritual qualities, as well as priests who worshipped and served a lie. This, indeed, is one of the happier consequences of that mysterious intermixture of good and evil in human character before which we often stand sorrowfully perplexed; that it keeps us from regarding any man, or any body of men, as wholly and irredeemably bad. If at times we fret and murmur because so many paths are open to our feet, and would fain have them all reduced to the straight narrow road on the one hand, and to the broad crooked road on the other, yet surely it is some comfort to know that the curves and windings of the crooked road often bring its travellers within sight of the narrow highway of Redemption; and that all those narrow lanes which the enemy has cut hard by the way of life, in order to betray the simple, have, through the mercy of God, many secret openings and bye-paths by which, after all, the simple are often led into the heavenly road. The devil is very cunning, but God is very wise; and wisdom is better and stronger than cunning, and often takes cunning in its own trap. A man may mistake evil for good, and may therefore worship an idol, bowing down before his own passion or his own phantasy, and yet his worship may be sincere; there may be latent in him many fine qualities, which, in happier conditions, under a kindlier

culture, would have brought forth fruit unto God ; and each of these latent qualities indicates a possibility of redemption ; each is a bye-path by which he may yet regain the way of life. Christ Himself has taught us that Tyre and Zidon "*would* long ago have repented" had they seen the mighty works done in Bethsaida and Capernaum ; and it may be that these priests of Baal, the Zidonian god, would also have repented had they had the chance, and have worshipped God in Christ with a devotion at least as deep as our own. At all events, it cannot but be right and pleasing to the God of all mercy that, while we reprobate their errors and vices quite as strongly as Elijah reprobated them, we should also recognize the good in them, which perhaps *he* could not see, and let this goodness of theirs throw some faint light of hope on the darkness into which they have passed.

But it may be asked, "What *was* there that was good and admirable in these idolatrous priests?" It is too commonly assumed that they were cunning impostors whose worship was a mere cloak for the indulgence of vice, and who ministered in Baal's temple simply for the gain they got thereby ; that they were very reluctant to accept the challenge of Elijah, and to put their claims to a decisive test. Those, however, who are most familiar with the monstrous forms of worship which the religious consciousness of man has assumed or accepted in the East, and with the entire sincerity and devotion with which these forms are observed, will be the last to listen to such an assumption as this. And assuredly the sacred narrative lends it no support. The whole story leaves the impression on our minds that these priests were as sincere and earnest in their devotion to Baal, as the modern Hindoo in his devotion to Siva or Juggernaut. They believed a lie, no doubt ; still they did believe it, and believed it with a passionate fervour which puts our devotion to the blush.

Three proofs, at least, they gave of their genuine sincerity: they continued instant in prayer, although their prayers were not heard; they were unabashed by ridicule, when ridicule was hardest to bear; they made painful sacrifices for their faith, shedding their very blood to please their god. Let us consider these three points.

I. *They continued instant in prayer.* From morning to noon they cried vehemently, "O Baal, hear us!" From noon till toward evening they redoubled their cries, although, and partly because, there was no voice, nor any that answered their importunate supplication.

Now, that the Ruler of heaven and earth *is*, and is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, are truths common to all creeds, whether true or false. They appear to be among the inborn and primitive convictions of our nature. It seems strange, however, that these convictions should often be held with a more tenacious and unwavering grasp by those on whom the true light has not arisen, than by those who "dwell in day." It seems, but is not altogether, strange; for one of the inevitable effects of Divine Revelation is that it invigorates the reason to which it makes its appeal; and reason, when clear and strong, asks questions and raises objections which do not occur to it while it feebly gropes about in darkness. Hence it may happen that a truth, an inward conviction, which a heathen never dreams of questioning, may grow questionable and dubious to a Christian, simply because he can no longer sleepily accept either the traditions of his fathers, or even the intuitions native to his own soul. And thus, perhaps, it has come to pass that while no heathen really doubts the efficacy of prayer, many Christian men have grave doubts of its efficacy. "God's will," they argue, "is a perfect and eternal will. How can we hope to alter that which is eternal? Why should we try to alter that which is per-

fect? The engine of his Providence moves on despite our feeble cries; and just because we see that it works out large results of good to the entire race, though it may injure this man or that, we decline to intermeddle with it, or to importune Him with our prayers."

Some such thoughts as these have doubtless troubled and darkened many of our minds, and led us to restrain prayer, or made us doubtful of its effect, just when we most needed to pour out our hearts before God. Yet, surely, they spring from an imperfect view both of prayer and of the Divine will. How shall we be sure what God's will is, save by those disclosures of his will which He has made to us in his Word? We dare not trust the deductions and inferences which we draw from the facts of human life as we see it around us, and as we find it in the story of the past. The facts are so many that we cannot grasp them, so contradictory that we cannot reconcile them; history fails to tell us half we need to know; our own reason is weak, fallible, and has often betrayed us. If we are to be *sure* what God's will is, He must declare his will to us. He *has* declared it, as we believe, in his Holy Word; and there we learn that "his will is our salvation," and that "whatsoever we ask in faith we shall receive." To stimulate us to importunate supplication, He has compared Himself to the ungracious neighbour who was not to be moved by friendship, and yet gave him a loaf who would not leave off asking for a loaf; and to the unjust judge who granted the widow's righteous suit, not because he loved justice, but lest he should be wearied by her continued coming—comparisons which mere man would never have dared to make, and from which, even now that *He* has made them, our natural human reverence shrinks. If in any one respect, therefore, the will of God be revealed to us, it *is* revealed in respect of prayer and its efficacy to secure his benediction.

God's Providence—which is one expression of his will, and only one—may be, as we are told, a machine moving straight on to the accomplishment of its ends. But in that case, even our own experience teaches us that every mechanical force, or instrument, takes its use from the attitude we assume towards it; that the engine, which will carry us if we put ourselves in the way of being carried, will crush us if we plant ourselves in its way; that the machine which, if rightly handled, will turn out linen or cotton or lace, will, if wrongly handled, break our finger or our arm. Our own experience teaches us that every machine must be tended and guided by a living intelligence greater than itself, if it is to subserve any good end or continue in working order; and that, so far from thinking it perfect, we should call that machine hopelessly imperfect the action of which could not be so checked and varied and adapted to the want of the minute as to take up a broken thread, or to weave the same threads into a thousand different webs and patterns. And does not even our natural reason suggest that the machinery of the Divine Providence, *with God to work it*, may have delicate self-acting and self-correcting adjustments capable of infinitely varied action?—may be able to stoop to this broken heart and that contrite spirit, and to reach its end through an endless diversity of means? Nay, as God and his providence are both perfect, may He not have foreseen and afore-provided for all the prayers we utter, and all the diversities of action and resource on his part which, to us, our prayers seem to induce?

On the other hand, true prayer is not an endeavour to alter the steadfast perfect will of God, but an endeavour to accept it and to conform to it. His will is our salvation. So much we know, and therefore we know that, though we may not ask Him to give us anything and everything on which we may have set out foolish hearts, yet, happily, we

may ask Him for the best things, as meekness, faith, wisdom, charity, in the full confidence that we are only asking that which, when asked, it is his will to give. In respect of other things we may indeed tell Him our thoughts and desires, what we *think* we need, what we think would be best for us, yet always with deference to his larger wisdom, and believing that, if He deny the wish we utter, it is that He may satisfy a want of which we are not conscious, and to give an answer to the prayer we should have urged had we known ourselves as He knows us.

“Thy will be done” is not only our best, our most perfect prayer, it is also our only prayer; that is, it is the one prayer into which all our other supplications may be resolved; it is the single theme of which all our prayers are but variations. God’s will will be done, whether I be banished from his presence or welcomed to his kingdom. To Him, possibly, it may make little difference whether his will be done in darkness or in light; but to me it makes a difference; and by prayer—the prayer to which obedience says “Amen,”—I come within the conditions of the promise which reveals his gracious will that I should not perish but have everlasting life.

Yet even though on these or other grounds we believe in prayer—nay, though we never had a doubt of its efficacy—how soon we lose heart and cease from our requests! How ready we are to infer that our prayers are not heard because they are not answered, or that they are not answered because the answer is other and better than that for which we listened! How soon we cease from our importunity, though God be a very gracious neighbour, and a judge whose justice knows no stain! How often we turn away from his door just as He has reached the door with the living bread in his hand, or drop our suit just as He is about to grant our suit! The priests of Baal rebuke our

faintheartedness, and the wavering desires which are tossed to and fro by doubt and fear. The suspicion never seems to have crossed their minds, that perhaps after all Baal would not care to listen to their supplications, or that, because many prayers had been fruitless, it would be vain to offer more. They cry to him from morning to noon although there is no response, and from noon to evening they redouble their cries, invoking him with passionate vehemence, steeping their prayers in their blood. That Baal has not answered is with them only an additional reason for supplication, and urges them to a more piercing importunity. They "continue instant in prayer" to a deaf idol who cannot hear, to a dumb idol who cannot speak; while we, alas, too often lose faith in the God who hears before we call, and answers while we speak!

Importunity in prayer is the natural expression of clear steadfast desire. The priests of Baal knew what they wanted, and were quite sure that they wanted it; with them it was a question of life and death that their god should answer their supplications and manifest his glory; hence they prayed without ceasing and without wavering. Were *we* as much in earnest, we should not be less importunate. But the fact is that, except on rare occasions, we do not put half our heart into our prayers, and do not put half our heart into our prayers mainly because we speak from a divided heart. We ask, for instance, that we may have a wider knowledge of the truth, and in a languid way we really should be glad to know more than we do; but we wish for much besides this knowledge, much perhaps which is inconsistent with growth in knowledge: we are not prepared to pay a high price for it, to take much trouble about it; or we wish to go pleasantly with the general set of thought in our circle and time; and if a wider knowledge of the truth should involve an advance beyond the received

opinions and established maxims of our day, we judge it to be a somewhat doubtful good. And thus it comes to pass that our wish is so feeble, and our prayer is fenced about with so many provisos and mental reservations, that we either get no answer to our prayer—at which we count ourselves very much aggrieved—or the opportunity of knowledge is sent, and we do not care to seize it. Or again, we ask for grace to choose and keep the steep narrow path of duty; and even as we are asking we look askance on some winding flower-strewn path where we shall have grass under our feet instead of hard sharp rocks; we cannot but confess that it looks very inviting and attractive; we almost wish, or quite wish, that we could walk in *that* without altogether forsaking the way of life. Is such a prayer likely to be heard? Should we very much care to have it heard? Let us at least learn from these priests of Baal to be single-hearted and sincere, to seek the Lord with a perfect heart. For if we thus seek Him, we shall surely find Him; if we thus call upon Him, He will open our eyes to see that He is always near.

II. *They were unabashed by ridicule.* Through the long morning hours they danced and prayed round the altar of their god, faint and weary, yet still pursuing him with invocations which won no response. At noon a severer trial came upon them; their apprehensions and misgivings were embittered by an irony as keen and remorseless as the lancets with which they cut themselves. “Call louder,” mocks Elijah, “for he is a god! but he is plunged in thought, or he has stepped aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleeps and must be awaked.” So far, however, from being abashed by the profound scorn of the Prophet, they are urged by it to yet more vehement and passionate appeals. They may be stung by his sarcasm, but the sting rouses all their energies, and goads them to new ardours of

devotion. They had striven with dance and invocation ; now they strive unto blood. And in thus meeting the prophetic scorn, and converting an obstacle into an incentive to worship, they shewed themselves more admirable than if they had stood steadfast amid a storm of opposition and reproach. For, whatever the cause may be, there can be no doubt that ridicule and contempt are even harder to bear than persecution. Those who could brave a frown are often daunted by a laugh. A sneer is more terrible than a sword. To be "accounted a fool for Christ's sake," taxes the patient constancy of faith even more heavily than for his sake to bear heavy burdens, or to lead the forlorn hope of Christian enterprise. There are many in whom the better life has been stabbed by an empoisoned jest from a wicked tongue, who could have encountered unhurt all the slings and arrows of a hostile world.

As at this avenue the young, and especially young men, lie perilously open to temptation, let me say a few words directly to them. If you have, as surely all young men have, your secret leanings towards goodness and piety, and the pure heroism bred of these ; if you really wish to acquaint yourselves with the will of God, and to form yourselves on the model of the Perfect Man, you are almost sure to meet with ridicule and affected contempt from the more worthless of your companions, and to find these the most formidable obstacle in your path. Some silly puppy (with his hair parted down the middle, perhaps, as if he suspected he did not belong to the stronger sex) will lisp out his feeble sneers at your "taking a pious turn," or at your "growing goody," or at your "not being half the man you were." You may not really respect him. You may know that his hair covers no brains, or none worth mentioning. You may know that he has not read many books, or mixed

much with wise and able men ; that he has never thought much about anything save his own foolish face, and gay apparel, and vulgar pleasures. You may hold him in such slight esteem that you would never dream of consulting him on any matter more important than the flavour of a cigar or the cut of a coat. He may not possess, so far as you can judge, a single quality which fits him for handling the facts of life to any wise or useful end. And yet you will often permit his vacuous simper, his stale and paltry gibes, to unsettle your gravest convictions, be shamed out of your wisdom by his folly, and fall from the true manliness to escape the sneer of one who very hardly deserves the name of man ! Does such weakness need any other rebuke than that it be simply and plainly described ?

None the less it cannot be denied that we are all of us, and not only the young, very much more sensitive to ridicule than it is healthy or right that we should be. It may be hoped that, as the years pass, we acquire a more settled and balanced judgment ; we have lived to very little purpose if we do not. *We* may hope that we are no longer wounded very sore by the puny bows and feeble shafts of the archers who were quite strong enough to "grieve" us in our earlier days. And, possibly, our hope is well founded. We may be able to meet the laugh of folly with the kindlier laugh of wisdom, and to break the arrows of feeble and vicious wit in hands which they have no longer power to wound. But none the less we shall acknowledge, if we are frank, that we still find ridicule hard to bear ; that if our neighbours, although we have no high opinion of their wisdom, begin to giggle and sneer, to wonder that we must needs set ourselves up to be so much better than other men, or to suggest, with merry incredulity in our singleness of purpose, that we do not 'serve God for nought ;' we are still in some peril of being shamed into

a conformity with their views which our conscience condemns: We are often made to blush for being in the right, by those whom we know ought to blush for being in the wrong. A sarcasm, even though it be irrational and undeserved, stings us like a blow, and, like a blow, is very apt to rouse that evil self which we have been at such pains to keep down.

Indeed it would be a curious subject of thought, and might land us in unexpected conclusions, were we to inquire how it is that mere ridicule carries so great a force; why it is that the sarcasms even of men whom we do not respect hurt us so much more than in reason they ought. The first answer that suggests itself is by no means flattering to our self-love. For the one real ground of ridicule surely is this,—that there be some marked disproportion between what we profess to be and what we are; that our actions do not correspond to that conception of ourselves which we have framed, and which by our words and bearing we have imposed on the world around us. If a man assumes, for instance, to be very witty, or very wise, or very brave, or very good, and yet, when he is put to the proof, turns out a dullard, a fool, a coward, a Pharisee, he surely is a fair mark for ridicule. These, of course, are extreme instances of disproportion between seeming and being, between the appearance and the reality; but if there were not in most of us the secret consciousness of a similar, though slighter, disproportion; if we did not fear lest, on trial, we should fall below both our own reputation and our own idea of what we are,—why should ridicule, and above all undeserved ridicule, disturb us so profoundly?

But whatever may be the cause of this extreme and perilous susceptibility, there can be no doubt, I fear, that it exists, and that it exists among sincerely religious persons at the present day in an alarming and unprecedented

degree. Time was when good men, in violation of all good breeding, were wont to thrust their religious opinions and spiritual experiences on all whom they met; when, whatever they were *in* season, they were certainly zealous *out* of season. Surely *that* is not a common fault just now. On the contrary, are we not running into the opposite extreme? Do we not hide our religious convictions and sentiments somewhat too carefully from the world—hide them at times with such complete success as to induce the natural suspicion that there cannot be much to hide? Do those of us who travel a little every year find in the good people we meet in railway-carriages and coffee-rooms, not that unctuous cant which is poisonously out of place everywhere, but that habitual reference of all things to the Christian standard which should be as native to them as the air they breathe? Do we not often find that where this inward reference to the Christian standard *is* habitual to them, they carefully discharge every trace of it from their words and faces when they mix with strangers? Nay, are we not conscious that we ourselves have too often worn this mask of cold indifference over our deepest and warmest convictions when we have travelled with unknown companions? Has it not been a relief to us when some slight accident of the road, or some turn of expression, has emboldened us to lay aside the mask, and we and they, no longer with any fear of contemptuous astonishment or open ridicule before our eyes, have once more shewn our natural face and spoken in our native tongue?

We all know how these questions must for the most part be answered, and how much need there is, therefore, that we should learn a lesson even from the idolatrous priests of a barbarous age. No one will maintain that Baal, who demanded that men should be sacrificed to him, had so true a claim on human allegiance and fidelity as He has who

gave Himself a sacrifice for us. Yet the priests of Baal bore the sharpest ridicule unmoved, and that when it was driven home with its utmost force. Elijah taunts them with the vanity of their worship just when, to all outward seeming, their worship *was* vain; he mocks at Baal as a deaf, careless, pre-occupied, absent God when, after hours of passionate supplication, "there was no voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." And still they are unmoved, or are moved only to a more vehement expression of faith and desire. If, then, we should be moved by ridicule, or the fear of ridicule, to renounce our faith in Christ, to conceal our loyalty to Him, to abate the fervour of our devotion to Him, may we not well fear lest even Baal's priests should rise up in the Judgment to condemn us?

III. *They made sacrifices for their faith.* It is surely a crucial test, a convincing proof of faith, that men should willingly suffer in its behalf. The priests of Baal gave this crowning proof of their sincerity. They worshipped Baal, the Sun-god; and the sun, so beneficent here in the West, where we see so little of him, can be very fierce and cruel in the East, smiting the traveller with deadly heat, decimating broad provinces with drought. Hence Baal was reputed fierce and cruel as well as beneficent—a stern thirsty god, whose evil moods yielded to no charm but blood. And his priests gave him the cup, the libation, he loved. They freely shed their blood—*their own*, not only that of other men; "they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood *gushed* out." But on this perhaps, as being a critical occasion, they went beyond themselves, and in an unwonted ecstasy of desire offered a sacrifice which at other times they refused to make? No; it was a special occasion indeed, and they may have been more than commonly prodigal of their blood; but the Bible—which, unlike us,

is always fair to those whom it condemns—expressly tells us that “they cut themselves *after their manner*,” so that we know it was their custom to lacerate themselves, to shed their blood in order that they might propitiate their god.

Now it is not a little singular to reflect, that the more cruel and exacting their religious faith, the more ready men seem to be to make the sacrifices it demands. The Moslem pilgrim will painfully drag himself across a continent, dare perils of robbers and of false friends, perils of burning deserts and stormy seas, perils of infection and famine, in order to stand in the sacred tomb of his Prophet, and become a hadji, or holy one. The Hindoo devotee will cast himself beneath the broad ponderous wheels of the idol-car, or swing suspended by the sinews of his back, in order to win a smile from the fell powers he worships. And where, if we except the primitive times and the early Catholic missions, shall we look for the Christian faith which has stood so cruel a test?

Some years since an explanation of this singular fact was current so base that one hopes it has at last been finally remitted to the limbo it ought never to have left. It used to be said—I myself have heard good men say it—“Ah, poor things! of course the heathen make sacrifices and do good works; and the Catholics, *they* hope to *earn* eternal life for themselves; *we* receive it as *the free gift* of grace. They have not like precious faith with us.” But is not faith proved by works? Without works is it not dead? And can fear or self-interest furnish stronger incentives to obedience, to sacrifice, than love? Because God has been so good to us in that He has revealed Himself as the infinite and redeeming Charity, are we to do less for Him than if we held Him to be a monster thirsting for our blood, or a harsh and austere master exacting heavy toils for a scanty wage? If we have the loftier and more generous faith, and

act on the inspiration of the loftier and more generous motives, shall we not outdo and outsuffer those to whom God is not known, or those who misconceive his grace?

How so base a logic ever passed with good men is at least as great a wonder as the wonder for which they were trying to account; for, obviously, the purer our faith, and the larger the grace in which we believe, the more willingly should we render any obedience and make any sacrifice which our faith demands.

“Yes,” it may be said, “but while that is true, it is also true that God does not *ask* us to shed our blood for Him; it is no custom of his Church that we should cut ourselves with knives and lancets. We best worship Him when we grow in righteousness, and peace, and joy.”

We grant it. God *has* revealed Himself as our Father and Redeemer. He loves us, body and spirit, and would not have us atone the sins of the spirit by injuries done to the body. He redeems the body from its bondage to corruption, and the spirit from its bondage to the flesh, that we may share his righteousness, his peace, his joy. But even this truth may be turned into a lie. It is turned into a lie if we conceive of the Gospel as demanding no sacrifice at our hands, or even as demanding a lesser sacrifice than they made who knew not God. The very essence of the Gospel is sacrifice—God’s self-sacrifice as a motive to our sacrifice of self. It bids us “take up the cross,” and be “partakers of the death of Christ.” It commands us to “pluck out the right eye” if it offend, and “cut off the right hand.”

“But these are figures of speech?”

Undoubtedly they are figures of speech; yet why are they used if they have no meaning? Why are they so strong and so severe if they have not a strong severe meaning? To suppose that, because God has wrought

salvation for us, we have not to work out our own salvation, to suppose that we can work out our own salvation without a rigorous self-subdual and self-chastening, is at once to misconceive the Gospel, and to reject the teachings of experience. Only by the severities of self-discipline and self-sacrifice can any man fit himself for the service and kingdom of God. The true worship is indeed righteousness, and peace, and joy ; but to our fallen natures righteousness is difficult, and peace comes only after the sword of the Spirit, and we enter into joy only after many painful conflicts with evil. To sever the vital cords which bind us to evil habits ; to crucify the lusts and passions which, in the soul, make war against the soul ; to replace the selfishness native to us with the charity which is its very opposite—this, surely, is a far more painful and laborious task than to cut the body with knives and lancets. And this is the task, this is the sacrifice, which Christ demands of as many as are his.

Are we, then, as true to our faith and its demands as the priests of Baal were to theirs? What! *we* shed our blood in worship? Some of us will not brave a shower, or sacrifice an hour's ease, in order to join in worship, or do so much to meet with God as we would very gladly do to meet a man we liked! Let us take heed to ourselves, lest, failing to sacrifice that which is least for outward worship, we should grow unwilling, and at last unable, to sacrifice that which is greatest for the worship of obedience. Let it never be said of us that we do less to serve the Lord of all grace and love than they did whose god was a lie, and whose worship an orgy and a torment.

XIX.

Christ's Ministry in Jerusalem.

ACTS I. 15.

IT is really very wonderful to find what a wealth of meaning there is even in those passages of Holy Writ which seem, to an ordinary reader, the most casual and insignificant. Whatever our theory of Inspiration may be, the more familiar we make ourselves with the Inspired Word, the stronger grows our conviction that there is absolutely no Scripture which is not profitable when once we approach it from the right point of view. Here, for example, is a mere and brief parenthesis, thrown out apparently in the most accidental way, with no bearing on any grave point of dogma or discipline. Had it altogether dropped out of the Sacred Record, we should never have missed it, and should have been, we might think, none the poorer for the loss. And yet how much we may learn from it! what light it throws on the results of our Lord's earthly ministry! what valuable hints it gives us on points both of dogma and of ecclesiastical method!

It indicates, for instance, that from the very first a certain care and oversight was exercised in the Christian Church; that those who accepted Jesus as the Christ were organized into a communion, a society. When He went up on high it was not only known that about a hundred and twenty men and women believed on Him; but their very "names"

were carefully entered on a roll ; that roll was carefully preserved : so that in after years "the number of the names" could be accurately given. Nothing in the Gospels has prepared us for this careful enumeration of the disciples of Christ ; we there read of them only in their personal relation to Him, not in their connexion with each other : but for this parenthesis we should not for a moment have supposed that their names were registered, that they formed an organized society, capable of taking instant and methodical action as soon as their Lord had gone up into heaven.

Again : This parenthesis casts a suggestive side-light on the doctrine of Inspiration. St. Luke does not give us the exact number of the names on the Church-roll ; he does not tell us that there were precisely a hundred and nineteen, for instance, or a hundred and twenty-three, but that there were "*about* a hundred and twenty." And that word "*about*," if it proves nothing, surely suggests an argument against the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture. It suggests that in matters within the scope of their knowledge or research, the sacred historians were left to study such documents as were accessible to them. If we held that, instead of leaving them to tell the truth each in his own way, the Holy Spirit dictated the very words they were to write down, we could not but wonder that He should dictate so ambiguous a phrase as "*about* a hundred and twenty" when it would have been just as easy for Him to give the exact as to give an approximate number. Of course there are many stronger reasons than this against the verbal theory ; but, as to many minds a side-light is often more illuminating than the light of direct argument, even this suggestion is not without its value.

Once more : This parenthesis, slight and trivial as it seems, discloses an ecclesiastical law, a method of Church action, which has been too much forgotten. St. Luke is

describing the first election in the Church, the election of an Apostle, who was to "take the place from which by transgression Judas fell." He has told us that the believers, "women" as well as men, habitually met with one accord in one place (verse 14). He goes on to say that one day, when they had met as usual, St. Peter stood up in the midst of them, to propose the election of a new Apostle. But, as he writes, it seems to have struck him that a doubt may arise as to whether the whole company of them that believed took part in the election. And so between the sentence in which he describes St. Peter as standing up to speak and the sentence in which he records the opening words of St. Peter's speech, he interjects the phrase, "Now the number of the names all told was about a hundred and twenty." Obviously the intention of the parenthesis was to affirm that the hundred and twenty men and women who composed the Church at Jerusalem, and not only the eleven Apostles, "cast lots," or, as we should say, proceeded to the election, not of a minister only, nor of a bishop only, but of an Apostle. In short, the right of the laity, the right of women even, to vote in the election of Church officers even of the highest grade, is thus emphatically recognized and conceded. It was the whole Church, and not any clerical order or caste, which decided between the rival claims of Justus and Matthias.

Now here surely are valuable lessons to come from so brief and trivial a phrase. This casual parenthesis, which seems to break the flow of St. Luke's story for no obvious or sufficient purpose, teaches us that even in the earliest times the Church of Christ was an organized Society; it teaches us that in this Society the right of election to the ministry of the Church lay with the laity no less than with the clerics, with women no less than men: and it suggests grave doubts on a current theory of Inspiration.

But all this is by the way. The main value of this brief parenthetical phrase consists in the fact that it yields us an exact measure of at least the visible and tangible results of our Lord's ministry in Jerusalem: and it is to this point chiefly that I wish to direct your thoughts.

The public ministry of the Lord Jesus did not at most extend beyond three years. Two of these years were spent in Galilee; only one, and that at intervals, in the city and neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Nevertheless He spoke some of his weightiest discourses, and did his mightiest works, within its precincts. And of all men then on the face of the earth the Jews of Jerusalem were the most favoured, the most familiar with the ancient Scriptures which testified of Christ, and with the sacred symbols and forms of worship which were but his shadows thrown before. And, therefore, they should have been the first to recognize Him and to respond to his claims. Yet when his work was finished, when He left the world which owed Him so much and requited Him so ill, the number of those who believed on Him was only a hundred and twenty! Out of all that vast populous city, the city too of the Great King, only some six score men and women had entered the fellowship of his grace and love!

Was there ever a more startling, inexplicable, and almost incredible fact? The fact grows more strange and incredible as we contrast it with other facts of the time. Just before the commencement of *his* public ministry and immediately after its close, two other notable teachers arose in Israel, and laboured with a success which makes his want of success the more inexplicable. These teachers were, of course, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Peter.

John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking. An austere eremite of the woods, it was his function to prepare the way of the Lord by denouncing sin and predicting judg-

ment. There was nothing either in his message or in the manner in which he delivered it which augured a successful ministry. He shewed no deference to learning, to rank, to priestly authority, to saintly assumptions : nor did he flatter the multitude or espouse any popular cause. He held the same tone of rigorous uncompromising severity to priest and ruler, to the self-righteous Pharisee with a stomach for all formulas and the sceptical Sadducee for whom there was no angel nor resurrection, to the violent rapacious mercenary, the grasping apostate publican, and the fickle and turbulent mob. To him they were all "a brood of vipers," stinging and being stung ; a knotted jungle of evil trees bringing forth evil fruit. His one demand on them was, "Repent, Amend." And yet the Baptist was the most popular preacher of the day ! All sorts and conditions of men flocked to the Ford in the Desert that they might listen to his reproofs. "All Jerusalem and all Judea" went out to him, and were pricked to the heart as they listened to this incarnate "voice in the wilderness," and were baptized of him in the Jordan—baptized unto repentance and the hope of Messiah's speedy manifestation to Israel.

Here, then, was a great preacher, a successful preacher. Within a few months he converted and baptized the whole country-side—all Jerusalem and all Judea feeling and confessing his power. In that very city and country, when Jesus died, *He* numbered among his followers only a hundred and twenty names ! Had we listened to these two preachers and witnessed the results of their respective ministries, we might have wondered that the Teacher full of grace and truth should produce so slight an effect as compared with the austere Censor of popular sins ; but should we not have concluded that, if the one with so unpopular a message had his myriads when the other had but scores of converts, the Baptist was by far the greater man and the greater preacher

of the two? Should we not have predicted that John would be the founder of a large and growing sect, while in a few years the very name of Jesus would be forgotten? Yet see how "Time and the hour," how "Time and He that shapes it to a perfect end," have falsified the prediction! John is now remembered only for the sake of Jesus,—only as the cousin and forerunner of Him whom all men now acknowledge to be at least the greatest Teacher the world has ever seen. Where are John's converts now? The converts of Jesus—where are they not? It was John's ministry that failed, not Christ's. The impression he made was wide, but not deep, and therefore not enduring. Myriads came to his baptism of repentance; but they did not repent. He pointed them to the Lamb of God; but they did not follow the Lamb. And, on the other hand, if the impression made by the Lord Jesus was not wide, it was deep and lasting—deep as the heart of man and lasting as eternity. The six score men and women who received Him became the children of God and were *possessed* by his Spirit. His word was "as a fire shut up in their bones;" they could not "forbear" to speak of Him; to bear witness to Him was the one work from which they could not "stay." Instant in season and out of season, they put a new face on the world by putting a new heart into the world.

Great apparent successes, then, may hide real failures, while apparent failures may hide the largest and truest success.

"It is not so with Him that all things knows
As 'tis with us who square our guess with shows."

God does not look on the mere "shows" of success or failure, but on the heart, the spirit and motive, of a work or ministry; while in our impatience for immediate results, *we* too often snatch at the mere "shows" of failure or success.

We count up "the number of the names" of those who are converted and baptized, and judge of a ministry by these outward and often deceptive appearances. Many a minister thinks it a poor result of his life-long labours if he has but won a hundred and twenty to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; many a missionary accounts himself a failure because he has not baptized more than a few score converts, although, in the very city of God, the Lord whom they serve did no more. And the Church is often as impatient of large immediate results as its servants, even though it does little to secure them. Let us understand, then, that mere numbers are not an accurate criterion of the success of a ministry or the worth of a mission. If a ministry or a mission really lays hold of the hearts of men, however few, if it breathe the large purifying spirit of truth, and helps men to live a higher, nobler, better life; if, above all, it turns those whom it reaches into servants of Christ and ministers of the Word, compelling *them* to take some part, however humble, in the sacred enterprise of bettering and redeeming the world, that mission or ministry deserves our sympathy and co-operation. There is hope in it, because there is life in it and power; and sooner or later it will justify itself by its success, even if those who started it should not live to share in the joy of its success.

But in this last thought I have anticipated the lesson of another contrast—the familiar contrast between the ministry of Christ and that of St. Peter. By the labour of many months in Jerusalem the Lord Jesus gathered to Himself only six score disciples. The very first time the Apostle Peter preached in Jerusalem no less than three thousand converts were added to the Church: that is to say, in a single day, by a single sermon, St. Peter "stung" to a saving "compunction" twenty-five times as many souls as were saved by the gracious words of Christ during the whole course of his

ministry in Jerusalem. Shall we then say that the Apostle was the greater, or even the more successful, preacher of the two? To say that would be to judge them simply by the number of their converts, and to ignore all the other facts which the Sacred Record supplies. If we take the whole Record, we shall find that the success of Peter was really the success of Christ; that, but for Christ, for all spiritual ends St. Peter would have spent his strength for nought. For the Lord Jesus trained preachers as well as preached sermons. And not only did He take Peter from his fishing boat, make him "a fisher of men," and then send him forth to catch what souls he could; besides training this great preacher, He prepared his audience, furnished his text, gave him his power.

(1.) *He prepared Peter's audience.* Dropping from our thoughts for a moment the supernatural gift and power of the day of Pentecost, we may in part account for the splendid success of St. Peter's discourse by the fact, that the Lord Jesus had kindled in Jerusalem just that electrical condition of the spiritual atmosphere in which religious impulses are most potent and most contagious. The vast multitudes who came up to Jerusalem for the Feasts of the Passover and the Pentecost had all heard something of the great Nazarene; many of them had listened to his words and seen his works: almost all of them must have heard of the raising of Lazarus and have seen and swelled Christ's triumphant entry into the City. Now to an excited crowd of men, to a crowd under religious excitement—as the pilgrims to Jerusalem were sure to be—the report that a Rabbi who claimed to be the Messiah had spoken with a power and grace which none could resist; that He had expired on a convulsed earth and under a lurid and darkened heaven; the rumour that his tomb, though sealed and guarded, had been found empty, and that his disciples

affirmed Him to have risen from the dead and gone up into heaven : to such a crowd, at such a time, omens and portents, signs and wonders such as these could not fail to be startling and absorbing. They would muse on them in their hearts, and consider what they meant ; they would eagerly gather up the various rumours that were afloat, discuss them, dispute over them. Staying in Jerusalem for more than fifty days, that they might keep both Passover and Pentecost, they would have ample leisure to learn and discuss all that was known of the crucified Nazarene, of his mighty words and gracious deeds. If they did not, as I daresay many of them did, conclude that the priests and rulers had been over hasty in their decision, they would be sure to believe that such marvels as the earthquake, the eclipse, the empty tomb, were significant of changes near at hand. They would be on the watch, on the strain, to see what the sequel, and the end, of these things would be. And when new marvels occurred, when a mighty rushing wind swept through the city, when tongues of fire floated in the air, when unlettered men spake in many strange and alien tongues, the excitement and suspense would grow. St. Peter would speak to an audience eager to learn what interpretation he had to offer of events so singular and unprecedented,—an audience predisposed to adopt the first coherent and reasonable interpretation of them. When the Apostle proceeded to cite the words of prophets and psalmists out of their own Scriptures, and to shew them that that which they had seen and heard was the fulfilment of the ancient prediction concerning the Messiah ; when he affirmed that “ Jesus of Nazareth, a man authenticated to you of God by prodigies and signs which God wrought by Him, *as ye yourselves also know,*” was the very Messiah for whom they had yearned, it is no wonder that they were cut to the very heart. The wonder would rather have been if a vast crowd, under the

strain of so tense and supreme an excitement, had not been "stung with compunction" and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

(2.) Again : He who had thus prepared his audience, also *provided St. Peter's text*. Beyond all question the Apostle's sermon is one of the noblest pieces of natural rhetoric of which we have any record. His calmness and self-possession under the pressure of so novel and exhausting an excitement ; the instinctive art with which he conciliates his audience and takes them into his confidence, quoting their favourite authors and claiming to speak freely to them because he is a Jew as they are ; the awful suspense in which he holds them by reserving to the closing periods of his discourse the charge which these citations from the prophets were intended to introduce and clench home upon their consciences ; the gathered and voluminous force with which he at last hurls at them the accusation of having crucified Him whom God had made "both Lord and *Christ*,"—all prove him a born orator, a consummate though unschooled rhetorician. But it was not his rhetoric which gave him his power to pierce and charm the general heart of his audience : *that* was but the feather of his arrow ; the dart that pierced them was the simple story of the Divine Love and of their rejection of it. God had sent them the very Christ to whom all the ancient prophets pointed with one finger, the Christ who was to save them from all their sins and miseries, and to bring in the golden age of righteousness, freedom, love and peace ; and they had slain Him with lawless hands. It was they themselves who had extinguished the Great Light for which they had longed through centuries of darkness, the Great Hope which had borne them up through all their wrongs and oppressions and calamities. But they had done it ignorantly, and ignorantly had carried out the counsel of the Eternal Will. And therefore God would not condemn and

abandon them. God had raised Him whom they slew, carried Him up into heaven when the earth would no longer endure his presence. He was there now ; and there, not to take vengeance on the earth which had banished Him, but to give repentance to men and remission of sins. He was still their " Lord " if they would obey Him ; " still their Christ " if they would be saved by Him. Let them but repent, amend, obey, and that strange mystic gift of the Holy Ghost, the mere signs of whose advent had filled them with awe and astonishment, should be shed down on *them* and on their children.

You see, though St. Peter quotes psalmist and prophet, his text is Christ ; his theme, the wonderful pathetic story of that Divine Love which *will* bless men and do them good, despite their follies and crimes. And in this simple pathetic story, however simply and crudely it may be spoken, there is a force far beyond that of mere rhetoric, a power wholly beyond the reach of art. Even *we*, who have heard it as long as we can remember, hope to hear it, and to be touched and purified by it, as long as we live.

(3.) Finally, besides preparing his audience, and providing his text, the Lord Jesus *procured the power* with which St. Peter spake. A little while since I said we would leave out from our thoughts the special gift and power of the day of Pentecost. But we cannot long leave it out of our thoughts. The Sacred Narrative will not suffer us to do that. It is so constructed that though, in recording the wonders of that great day, it expends but few words on the advent of the Holy Ghost, we feel throughout that this is the supreme event, the motive force of the whole story. St. Luke dwells a little on the mighty rush of wind, on the tongues of fire, on the speaking with many tongues ; he gives St. Peter's discourse at unusual length, and vividly describes the effects it produced both in augmenting the strength

and in exalting the tone of the Church. He devotes only a single verse to the effusion of the Holy Ghost ; he says only, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit granted them to speak." Nevertheless we feel that these brief simple words contain the very pith and kernel of the story, that they assign a sufficient cause for all its wonders.

When the Son of God took flesh and dwelt among us, a new star announced the new birth ; the angels broke from heaven to follow Him who had been the Joy of heaven. And, in like manner, it was to be expected that when the Spirit of God came to dwell in all flesh, in young men and maidens, old men and children, there would be "prodigies in the heaven above and signs upon the earth beneath." Above all it was to be expected that men should be moved "to call upon the Name of the Lord, and that "everyone whosoever" did call on that Name "should be saved." We cannot wonder, then, that, as Peter, "filled with the Holy Ghost," proclaimed "Him, whom God had made both Lord and Christ," thousands should "receive his word" and be baptized into the faith of Christ. It was the quickening Spirit which gave his word its penetrating and quickening power. But that Spirit was the gift of Christ ; it was shed forth by Him. In the foreknowledge and counsel of God it had been ordained that only when Jesus went up on high should the Holy Ghost be sent down on men. It was for the fulfilment of Christ's promise, "when I depart, I will send Him to you, even the Spirit of truth, the Holy Ghost," that the Apostles had tarried in Jerusalem. The promise was this day fulfilled. Just as Christ was "God manifest in the flesh," so the Holy Ghost was Christ manifest in the spirit. *Therefore* it was, because he was filled with the Spirit, that the Apostle spoke with such large and happy results. But therefore also Peter's success was really the success of

Christ. Being dead, the Son of Man yet spake, and his works followed Him.

Here, then, is fresh comfort and incentive for all who serve Christ, whether at home or abroad. Visible and immediate success may, or may not, be granted them in their work. There is no reason why they should despair of it, for Christ, as He furnishes their theme, can prepare their audience for them, and may so fill them with his Spirit that none shall be able to resist them. It is not as though they were called to speak or serve in their own wisdom and strength, or must trust to these for the effects they are to produce. So long as they carry the simple story of Divine Love to weak and sinful hearts, their Master is with them and for them, succeeding in their successes, triumphing in their triumphs. But whether their success be instant and visible, or invisible and deferred, they *cannot* labour in vain. Like the Master Himself, they may die and see but little fruit of their labour; but, like Him also, being dead, they will yet speak. They may only have kept a few of their fellows in mind of God, and helped them to live in the love and obedience of the truth; they may have only won a few to the faith and service of Christ, who, but for them, would have still been "sold under sin:" but, if they have been faithful to the truth that was in them, they shall in no wise lose their reward. The six score souls saved by Christ during his earthly ministry who, when He died, were lost in the millions that crowded Jerusalem for the Feast, have grown into a mighty Christendom in which even the millions of Jerusalem would be lost. Night and day, from every land on which the sun looks down, there now rises to heaven an unbroken chorus of praise from the spiritual heirs and descendants of that little company whom a single chamber was large enough to contain. And, if the word of God be true, the future will show even greater wonders and triumphs

than the past, triumphs and wonders in which we shall have our part if only we serve Christ out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Let no man's heart fail him, then, and let no man be impatient for large immediate success. Whoever helps to keep the little world about him sweet and pure, to raise its tone and hallow its spirit, and much more whoever goes out into the large world to carry the good news of salvation to souls bound in sin and misery, is serving the Lord Christ and helping on the coming of his kingdom. What though he win no fame for himself? What though he die and be forgotten of men? Christ whom he has served will not forget him, nor his labour of love. The world will be the better for him, and the crown of Christ the brighter. And is not that a reward for which the most ambitious soul alive might be well content to fling away his life?

XX.

The Parable of the Porter.

ST. MARK XIII. 34.

IN this brief Parable the holy catholic Church is compared to a great mansion, with many duties, offices, servants—a vast, complex, interior ministry, every function of which must be regularly and diligently discharged if the house is to be kept in order and the household are to live in comfort and peace. His affairs have called the master, the head of the household, abroad ; but, before he starts on his journey, he calls the whole family together, gives to each of them authority to maintain the order and seek the welfare of the household, appoints to each his special task, and lays strict command on the Porter, not only to look for his return, but also to keep watch on all who come in and go out at the gates. He then starts on his journey. And *now* all depends on the fidelity with which each of the servants devotes himself to his several and special task. Any remissness, or unfaithfulness, on the part of any one of them, may throw the whole domestic system out of gear, may involve it in a confusion which the efforts of the faithful servants will very hardly repair ; while, if only a few of them become unpunctual, indolent, negligent, there will be a dreary scene of waste, disorder, discord when the master

returns. On the other hand, if all are prompt, diligent, strenuous in the discharge of duty, the whole family will dwell together in concord and prosperity; and when the master returns he and they will be glad together.

This is a parable, or picture, of the Christian Church, and of every separate section, or congregation, in the Church. *Our* Master, the Son of Man, has taken a far journey; He has gone up into heaven: but He has given to each of us, first, a general commission to seek the welfare, to promote the order and efficiency of the Church; then, a special work to do for Him; and then, a stringent injunction to keep watch at the gates, that we may look for and welcome his return. The Parable is so simple, and its application is so obvious, that it is a complete though brief homily in itself, which hardly seems to need any exposition or enforcement. Nevertheless, it may be worth while to dwell a little on the main thoughts it suggests; for, simple and obvious as they are, it is our practical neglect of them which renders our churches so much less strong and serviceable than they might and ought to be.

(1.) Let us glance, then, at that first simple thought of *the authority* which the departing Master confers on all his servants. We all know that in a household where the master and father is served from love, and not from fear, when he goes away for a time, the children and servants, if they are good and faithful, bestir themselves to shew that they are not unworthy of the trust he reposes in them. A pulse of quickened affection and activity spreads from heart to heart. A new and invigorating sense of responsibility stimulates them to a more steadfast and earnest discharge of duty. Now that the master is gone, each of them feels as though, in his measure and degree, he must take the master's place—think for him, act for him, watch for him, look after his interests with a jealous eye, and go beyond the mere

lines of duty in order to promote them. Good servants always, they are now more than ever anxious that all things should go to his mind, that nothing should be wasted, nothing omitted, nothing lost. They try to keep the whole round of service up to its highest mark. They try to make the house look its brightest against his return. The hope of his approval rouses them to an unwonted energy and patience and steadfastness.

Now *is* this the spirit in which we give ourselves to the service of the Church at large, or even to the service of that section of the Church with which we are most intimately associated? Our Master has gone away from us; He is in a far country. We profess that, not from fear, but from sincere and cordial love for Him, we have entered his service and come to dwell in his house. Do we feel, then, that He has given us authority to seek in all ways the good of his Church, its order, its concord, its efficiency? Do we feel that, while He is away, we, in our measure and degree, have to fill his place, to think for Him, to act for Him, and, if need be, to suffer and make sacrifices in order that we may carry out what we take to be his will? Do we go with constancy and patience even into the irksome and petty details of his service, and endeavour that even that which looks smallest and meanest in it may be finished with our utmost skill? As we move about the house, or take part in the worship of the Church, do we study its interests? Do we habitually consider what there is which interferes with its comfort, its order and beauty, its growth and success, which we can remove or help to remove? Do we search out what is weak, or lacking in the ministry and service of the Church, not that we may expose or complain of the inefficiency of the fellow-servants who fail, or whom we assume to fail, in their duty; but that however unwelcome the duty may be to us, or however weary and exhausting the duties

we already discharge, we may supply that which is lacking, and strengthen that which is weak? Are we conscious that we are *all* officers in the Church to which we belong, all *deacons* or servants, even though no official position and honour be assigned us? Are we *at home* in the house of God? Do we feel that we have "the authority" of a child and a servant in it? that we not only have a right to seek its welfare, but that we are bound to seek it by all the ties which bind us to Christ?

If we do, happy are we. For in many churches the prevalent feeling just now is that at all events most of the members of the congregation have nothing to do but to be ministered unto, nothing but to stand by and criticise the official servants of the house of God; that they themselves are in no way responsible for the comfort and beauty of the place in which they worship, or for the effectiveness of the worship in which they join, for the growth of the church, whether in numbers or in grace, or for the wise and effective administration of the various institutions connected with it. If anything is wanting, they do not feel that it is *their* privilege to supply it; if anything goes wrong, they do not feel that it is *their* duty to set it right. Ask them, Why? and they tell you that they have no authority in the Church, that they hold no office, and desire to hold none. They are too busy, too weary, too exhausted by the demands of daily life, or too infirm in health, to take part in the ministry of the Church, although they both see and expect neighbours of theirs who are just as busy and tired, just as exhausted or infirm as themselves to take part in it, and are by no means slow either to gibe or to murmur at them when they blunder or fail.

Now, here, as throughout his teaching, our Lord corrects this indolent and critical spirit. He tells us that, not officials alone, but *all* the servants in his house, all the

members of his Church, have "authority" from Him to promote, in all ways, the order and welfare of his Church, and to advance its interests. And only when all the members of a church feel as good servants feel when their master is absent; only when the sense of responsibility to Him and the eager desire to respond to the confidence He reposes in them quickens them to stedfast activity in his service, and constrains them to regard the interests of the Church as their own: only *then* will it rise to its true strength and blessedness. Nor is there any other means of securing this general and stedfast activity than by a more sincere and profound love for the Master whose servants and friends we all profess to be. If we love Him with all our hearts, we shall love one another as ourselves. We shall not dream of saying of any work which needs to be done, "*That* is no business of mine," or, "I am not bound to do *this*." Still less shall we stand negligently by, and say of those who are at least trying to serve the Church, "How badly they do it!" We shall feel that we are not only permitted, but bound, to take a full part in the service of Christ. We shall be eager to do all we can for the general good. No task will be too mean for us, no detail too petty or trivial. Constrained by the love of Christ, doing what we do as unto the Lord, and not unto men, we shall be forward to promote the interests of his household and to help our fellow-servants in their labour of love.

(2.) This is *one* of the simple lessons of our parable, that we all have authority from Christ Himself to seek the welfare of his house, the Church. And another is that, besides this general authority common to us all, we have each *a special work* to do for Him and for the family named after Him. "*To each his own work*," *i.e.*, the work he is specially fitted or called to do. No doubt there is a common work for us all, just as there is a common authority.

“ *This* is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.” “ This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” But this one work—faith in Christ and that vital purification of spirit which is the result of faith in Him—takes many forms. All men are not sanctified by the same means, in the same mode. Nay, the very conditions and tasks which strengthen faith or excite a purifying energy in one soul may be fatal to another ; as, for example, the conflict with great temptations, or the pressure of severe and accumulating sorrows. Our varieties of personal character and of habit and bent demand that our tasks should be varied if the same effect or end is to be reached in us all.

Nor is there any doubt that the great, common, but varied work of the Christian life should be done in all places, at all times. In our business and our recreations, in the home and the factory, no less than in the service of the Church, we may abide with God, and serve the Lord Christ.

But in this Parable the Lord Jesus refers, not so much to the sanctification of our whole private life, as to the special and direct ministries we are bound to render in the Church. He is speaking, not of *the general conduct* of the servants in his household, but of *the special household tasks* He has assigned them. And it is beyond question that, if we take Him for Master and Lord, we shall find some function to fulfil, some work to do, in his service. There is so much ignorance, so much misery, so much sin in the world around us, that if we have any spark of our Master’s love and zeal, we *must* endeavour to teach men, to comfort and redeem them. We dare not, and cannot stand idle and indifferent when so much work has to be done, and our fellow-servants are constantly soliciting our help. And whatever our faculties or gifts, the work of the Church is so varied, that we may every one of us find suitable employment in it, if only we are bent on finding it. None is so weak of will or poor in

endowment but that he may do a little good, if only he be set on doing it. Our Sunday Schools, our Benevolent Societies, our Choirs, our Colleges, our Missions Home and Foreign, are all calling for help. If we cannot teach *men*, we may be able to teach children. If we cannot even teach children, we may visit, we may relieve the poor and sick; we may speak cheerful words to them, and carry them a few flowers, or a little fruit, or some warm clothing, or get them medical aid, or we may ask more capable friends to succour them as we cannot. If we cannot speak for Christ to *many*, we may be able to speak for Him to a *few*; if not to a few, to the friend who is dearest to us. If we cannot speak at all, we can at least help to send out others who can and will speak for Him. If we have little to say, and less to give, we can at least make that little more by cherishing a faithful, gracious, and kindly spirit.

There is, then, a special work for every member of the Christian household, however lowly or however high his position, however few or however many his gifts. Christ is too wise a Householder to call any man into his service *who cannot serve*. And what sounds very strange and even untrue is, that the Parable represents Christ as Himself assigning a special task to every one of his servants. "He gave . . . to each his own work." That, I say, sounds strange and untrue to experience, for one of the commonest complaints we make is precisely this: "I am very willing to serve God and men, if only I knew what to do. But I have no special gift. I cannot pretend to any special Divine call. Like thousands more, I am at a loss to ascertain definitely what I should even try to do. I don't feel good for much, and when I am urged to do something in the service of Christ and the Church, if my heart grows hot with a fervent desire to respond to the appeal, I really don't know what to do; and so the impression soon dies away." *That,*

I think, is a very real and practical difficulty with many of us ; and if it is met in general terms, if we are told, "Your position in life, your natural bent and disposition, the claims urged upon your attention—these should guide you to a right choice of your special work," such a reply does not help us much or far. And yet no man who speaks to many men, however wise he may be, even though he be inspired as well as wise, can give other than a general reply. At best he can but make his reply as pertinent and helpful as the generality of his terms will permit. So that we are left, for the most part, to puzzle out a solution of the difficulty for ourselves. Happily, however, no solution of any moral problem is so truly helpful to us as that which, on due reflection, we discover each man for himself.

And if we are bent on solving *this* problem, we shall soon, I think, reach the conviction, that what we all want first and most of all is a keener and more stedfast *desire* to serve Christ in serving the Church. Were the desire but strong enough, we should soon find *some* means of gratifying it, and probably the best means. Take an illustration. Every man has a special work to do in the world, as well as in the Church. He has to earn his bread. There are many ways of earning bread. Of these he has to choose one. Often the choice is hard to make. A lad has no decisive bias to any trade or craft. He would as soon be one thing as another ; sometimes, apparently, he would rather be nothing, *i.e.*, he would fain lounge through life eating bread he has not earned. But, sooner or later, necessity compels him to take to this kind of work or that ; and, as a rule, he grows to be tolerably content with it, and contrives to earn his daily bread by it, whatever it may be. Well, but in the Church, as in the world, there are many forms of service ; and many of the servants in the great Household of Faith are not conscious of any special voca-

tion ; they do not feel that they have the gifts which would fit them for one kind of labour more than for another. But if necessity be laid on them, what will they do ? Naturally, they will either try this kind of work and that, till they find one which they can *like* as well as do, or they will take up the first work that comes to hand and gradually *make* themselves fit for it. The one thing they will not do is—nothing. To call themselves servants and yet not serve, to profess much zeal and yet shew none, this is the only thing they find to be altogether intolerable. Better any work, however humble, than none. And if *we* sincerely love Christ, and wish to be useful in his household, we may for a while be perplexed as to what kind of service it will be best for us to select ; but we shall surely set ourselves to some task : we shall try any work the Church may need to have done. If we can only open a door, or sweep a room, or sit with a kind face in a sick chamber, or teach a little child, or earn a few pence for the general purse—whatever we *can* do we *shall* do, and do it with our might ; and thus we shall take our part in the work of the Christian Household, and come to feel that our special task has been committed to us by no one less than Christ Himself. What we chiefly want is to feel that we *must* do something for Him who has done so much for us. As we get more love, we shall do more work. At all events, till we have tried all departments of Church service, till we have attempted every kind of distinctively Christian work, and have failed in them all, we shall utterly refuse to admit that *we* are servants who cannot serve, and that therefore we must continue to stand idle all the day long.

(3.) To work we are to add *watchfulness*. To each of the servants the Master gave his own work, “*and commanded the Porter to watch,*” that being *his* proper work. What are we to understand by this ? That the Porter *only* is to watch,

and that the other servants, so long as they discharge their respective tasks, are exempted from the duty of watching? No; that would be contrary to the whole spirit of the Gospel. And, indeed, our Lord Himself guards us against any such misconstruction of his meaning, for He closes his parable with the words, "What I say unto *you*, I say unto *all*, Watch."

What, then, is meant by this watching? The Parable itself makes reply. The Master has gone away on a journey; the time of his return is uncertain. The Porter is to stand at the gates and watch for the first signs of his coming. But the servants within the house are to be watchful also; they are to be in constant expectation of Him, in constant readiness for Him. Because they do not know when He will come, they are to be always prepared for Him, come when He will: to be always forward with their tasks, that He may find everything in the house to his mind, and may greet them, when they welcome Him, with approving joy.

And this is to be at once the method and the animating spirit of *our* service. We are not to be as drudges who have no pleasure in their labour, nor as hirelings who care only for their wages. Our labour is to be bright with hope, with the hope of a great happiness to come, and that *may* come at any moment. We are to do all we do in the Christian household as in the sight of a Master who, though absent from us for a time, is sure to return, and who, meanwhile, is present with us in spirit and much concerned in the success of our labours. Nor shall we watch in vain. The Lord is always coming to those who look for his appearing. We see his coming, on a large scale, in every crisis of the great human story. In revolutions, in reformations, when the thoughts of men's hearts are revealed, when they are called to accept new forms of truth or to enter on

new spheres of duty, we know that Christ has come once more, to try their works, to put them to the test, to see whether they have been faithful to Him and are ready to greet Him with love and joy. And in like manner, though not so obviously, He comes to us in the crises of our individual history, when one page of our life is closed and a new page is opened. For each one of us there is an advent of the Lord, so often as new and larger views of truth are presented to us, or we are called to leave a familiar round of duty and enter on new and perchance more laborious and exacting duties. If we are so absorbed in the mere routine of our previous service, or so attached to old forms of truth and service, that we have no eye for new forms of truth, and no ear for the call to new labours, we miss our happy chance; we are like servants who, stolidly plodding on through a familiar drudgery, do not hear when the Master stands at the door and knocks, and are even flurried and vexed should He bid them do what they have never done before. But if, while going resolutely and happily about our accustomed tasks, we look brightly and hopefully for the joy of Christ's return; if, because as yet we know so little, we *expect* Him to teach us new truths; if, because our service is as yet so imperfect, we *expect* to be called to other and better modes of serving Him, we are like servants who, living daily in the hope of the Master's return, catch the first signal of his approach, hurry out to welcome Him, and are rewarded for their watchful diligence by having greater authority committed to them and ministries which bring them nearer to his presence.

And all *these* advents of Christ, in new truths and new duties, are but preludes of that great personal advent, the hope of which most of all assures our faith and strengthens us for his service. When the Twelve stood on the hill of Bethany, gazing up into heaven after their ascended Lord,

the angels assured them, "This same Jesus shall *so come* as ye have seen Him go." Since that promise was given, the household of faith have cherished the hope of "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ." This hope is *ours*, if we care to make it ours, and is our best incentive both to fidelity and watchfulness. *We* are not left to peer vaguely into the future, and speculate on what it may bring. We know that He who once came and dwelt among us in great humility, will come again in the glory of the Father to complete the work He then began—to finish our redemption—to reward every act of kindness as though it had been shewn to Him. And therefore, we are watchful, and strengthen the things which are ready to die, not suffering any grace to perish out of our hearts in this world's unkindly weather, but guarding and cherishing it for the summer of eternity; not permitting any good enterprise to fail for lack of help, but breathing into it the life of our help till happier times arrive.

This, at least, is the temper we strive to maintain and ought to maintain. Because we hope and believe that Christ will come, we try to combine watchfulness with diligence, to hold ourselves ready for his advent while we devote ourselves to his service. To wait and watch is harder than to work; nay, at times our very diligence renders us unwatchful. We are apt to sink into mere routine and formalism, to go on doing what we have always done, not looking for new truths and new duties, but rather fearing and distrusting them. Hence it is, I suppose, that the parable lays special stress and emphasis on watchfulness. The Master "*gave* to each (of the servants) his own work;" but "*He commanded*"—a much stronger word—"the Porter to watch." It is only as we look for new revelations of Christ, only as we reach out to the things which are before and beyond us, only as we are sure that He will

come to judge our works, that we can keep our hearts alert, and faithful, and strong. Let us watch, then, as well as work ; nay, let us watch *as* we work ; and in due time the Master will come to us as we go, with diligent hand, on our stedfast rounds—come to reward us for every act of dutiful service and watchful love.

XXI.

Psalm C.

THE ablest critics assert that this Psalm was written for and sung by the Jews, who had returned from the captivity in Babylon, and that it expresses the ecstasy of their joy in resuming the services of the Temple at Jerusalem. The best commentators affirm that, of all the songs contained in the Psalter, this is the most blithe and merry, breathes the broadest spirit of charity, and rises to the highest pitch of exultation. And he must be dull indeed who demands any other proof of either of these conclusions than those which the Psalm itself supplies. As we read it, we cannot but feel, we can very hardly resist, the bright eager merriment of its tones ; we cannot but feel that it expresses the highest mood of a devout joy, the most intense and infectious gladness. So, too, the Psalm dates itself as soon as we catch its meaning and spirit. For it breaks through all the bonds of local and national exclusiveness ; it is not Hebrew, but catholic and universal in its tone ; it calls on "all lands," on all nations, to praise the Lord, on the express grounds of a common humanity and a common sonship : it represents God as the Maker, the Shepherd, the gracious Teacher and Saviour, of all races, of the Gentile no less than the Jew. And this, as we know, was a sentiment which the Hebrews acquired in their captivity. Then they began to

learn that God was the Father and Redeemer of all men, and that they were chosen of God to testify that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. Our Psalm is one of the earliest and happiest expressions of this catholic sentiment, and must therefore have been composed after the Captivity ; while its invitation to all lands, not only to serve and rejoice in God, but also to “ come into his *gates* with thanksgiving and into his *courts* with praise,” proves that it was composed after the Temple had been rebuilt.

The bright hilarity of the Psalm springs, therefore, from two causes : first, from the joy of recovered freedom and worship ; and, secondly, from the inspiration of the new and great conviction that all men, and not only one race of men, were the servants and sons of Him whose praise it sings.

Now if any man were to come to us and say, “ O be joyful in Jehovah ; serve Him with gladness, and come into his presence with a song,” so soon as we understood that he meant, not merely that we were to sing hymns in church, but also that our daily life was to be steeped in the rich hues of gladness instead of being suffused with the sad colours of doubt and fear, anxiety and sorrow, we should be apt to think that he was demanding a simple impossibility of us. We should be apt to say to him, “ The world is full of misery ; my own life is vexed with constant care and trouble : I myself am so imperfect, and see so much in myself to blame and regret ; my neighbours, too, are so imperfect and ungrateful and unkind, that I see but little cause for gladness. With so much to sadden and depress us, how can we hope to rise into the bright and merry mood to which you invite us ? ” In short, we are so full of ourselves, of our own petty anxieties and worries and annoyances, and we have so little trust in God and in his wise ordering of our life and of the world, that we take our very pleasures somewhat sadly, and

are not even ashamed of the sadness which gives the prevalent tone to our life. There are those who even regard sadness as a sign of grace, who confound melancholy with piety, who think there is peril, if not irreligion, in every form of genuine mirth. For them, God is an austere and inflexible judge; life a mortification; death a terror; and the next world mainly a hell. No wonder that they disfigure their faces and are of a sad countenance. But why should *we* go mourning all our days, we, to whom God is a Father, life a blessing, death a greater blessing still, and the life to come the greatest blessing of all? Let us at least acknowledge that "it is a comely fashion to be glad;" let us be ashamed that, with so many sufficient reasons for thankful mirth, we are so commonly "deject and wretched:" nay, let us try to catch the merry mood of our Psalm, and be unfeignedly joyful in the God in whom we believe.

It may help us to this better mood if we reflect on the conditions of the men who first sang this Psalm, and on the reasons which they assign for their gladness.

When we remember that they had recently recovered their freedom, rebuilt their temple, and restored its worship, we may think it was very natural that they should be glad; we may think that we also, in their conditions, could serve the Lord with gladness and come before Him with a song. But before we conclude that they were exceptionally happy, more happy than we are, in their circumstances, let us also remember what these circumstances were. They were somewhat as follows. Instead of the millions who prospered under the rule of David, the Jews who returned from the Captivity numbered not quite fifty thousand souls. Their metropolis was a heap of ruins. They had to rebuild the wall and gates of the city; to erect a second temple, which temple was so small and mean that the fathers, who remembered "the ancient house," wept as they beheld it.

They were surrounded by vigilant and malignant enemies, who occupied the whole land except Jerusalem and a narrow belt of fields immediately around it. They had to build with a weapon in one hand and a tool in the other. Their crops were perpetually trampled down or carried off by their foes. They were under the authority of the Persian satrap of the Syrian province, and lay at the mercy of his caprice. Only a few copies of their law were left; when Ezra the scribe brought out one of these copies, and read it to them, they "mourned and wept," as they learned from it how deeply they had sinned against the law, and how much they had lost by their sins. Here they were, a mere "remnant" of a mighty people, their broad fruitful lands reduced to a few plundered fields, the diminished metropolis, cumbered with blackened ruins, their only city, their little temple a mere relic of Solomon's spacious structure; with constant war in lieu of settled peace; with penury and want and danger in lieu of an unrivalled prosperity, ignorance in place of learning, a foreign despotism overshadowing the throne of David. Can we wonder that they mourned and wept as they stood "in the street before the Water Gate," and listened to Ezra as he "read in the law of God, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"? Were *these* circumstances to inspire joy, or even to permit of it?

One man thought they were. As Nehemiah, the brave governor of Jerusalem, looked down on the weeping crowd, he felt that all this sadness would never do, that it would only unman and enfeeble men whose task already taxed all their strength. And so he tells the Scribe to shut his book, and the Levites to bring their services to an end, and bids the people "mourn not nor weep, but go your ways, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to your poorer neighbours." Why? Because, as he is wise enough to see,

“the joy of the Lord” would be their strength. Sorrow would only depress and unnerve them; joy would give them new heart and vigour. Let them be merry, therefore, and rejoice in the benefits they had received, instead of mournfully brooding over what they had suffered and lost.

The people take his counsel; and either Nehemiah himself or one of the prophets who worked with him, wrote this bright merry Psalm, to shew the people what “the joy of the Lord” was, to remind them how much they still had for which to praise and bless the Lord.

“It is He that hath made us, not we ourselves;
 We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
 The Lord is gracious; his mercy is everlasting:
 And his truth endureth from generation to generation.”

The argument is very simple, yet very cogent. God made us; and how can He hate those whom He has made, or wish to see them plunged in misery? * God cares for us; He knows us, and loves us and provides for us, as the shepherd for his sheep: and, therefore, He daily furnishes us with many themes for song, many motives for joy. *He* is good and merciful; and true through all changes and all ages, however capricious or cruel men may be; and if He is with us, and for us, who or what can be against us? His gates, his courts are open to us; we are free to worship Him: what though the gates be less costly, and the courts less magnificent than of old? our songs of praise and thanksgiving will be none the less acceptable to Him. “Serve the Lord with gladness, then, and be joyful in Him: go into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and speak good of his Name!”

If, then, we are of a weak and dejected spirit, if the tone

* “For never wouldst Thou have made anything if Thou hadst hated it, O Lord, Thou lover of souls.”—*Jesus, Son of Sirach.*

of this Psalm strikes a discord with the habitual tone of our life, we can no longer ride off on the excuse that the Jews who took this tone were in happier and more joyful conditions than ours. Better off! they were infinitely worse off: they rise up and condemn us as cravens if we cannot keep at least as high a pitch of gladness as that to which they mounted. Have not we at least all the causes for joy and mirth which their Psalm recites? God made *us*, did He not? He provides for us, as the shepherd provides for his flock. We have found Him true when men were false, of a mercifulness so great that He is ever more ready to forgive than we are to ask forgiveness, and very gracious so often as we draw nigh to Him. And surely his temple is open to us, if we care to enter it, although its gates may have little charm of beauty, and its courts be small and mean as compared with those of venerable abbey or stately cathedral. True, we have not just recovered our freedom of worship; our fathers conquered that long ago: but are we to value it the less because we have always had it? If we ought not, it is to be feared that we do. And not till we value it as we ought, not till we find in the service of God the best medicine for our weary and dejected moods, and our strongest incentive to joy, shall we recover that enthusiasm and pride of worship which breathes and burns in every word of this Psalm, and which animated our English fathers when the public worship of God was a perilous and uncertain good.

But what we chiefly want is not rebuke, but some such aids to cheerfulness and joy as the Psalm supplies. We all know very well that gladness is very helpful; that if we go to our daily tasks in a bright and hopeful spirit, we are the more likely to do them well, and that a dejected heart is very likely to bring about a fulfilment of the forebodings which oppress it. But in excuse for our lack of joy we plead, "It is very hard to be cheerful and merry in a

world so darkened by clouds, and with hearts so troubled as ours are, by cares and fears, by shames and regrets." Unquestionably it is hard, and very hard; and therefore we should welcome whatever may help us to achieve so hard a task; and this Psalm offers us help, and that in two ways.

First, it teaches us to dwell habitually on that which is good and bright and joyful in our lot, rather than on that which is evil and dark and sorrowful. The Jews, as we have seen, had much for which to mourn and weep. "We are so few," they might have said, "so poor, so weak, and our foes are so many and so strong; if we work at the walls we must guard our trowel with a sword; if we plough and sow our fields, we can never be sure that we shall not be robbed of our harvest; if we have a Jew for our governor, he is the slave of the Persian; if we go into the Temple, we cannot but see how small and poor it is; if we listen to the Law, we are ashamed to find how little we know of it." All this they might have said, and no doubt did say; but neither Nehemiah nor the Psalmist suffer them to say it unrebuked. They are invited to dwell rather on the goodness and mercy and truth of God, on his care for them as their Creator, their Ruler, their Father and Friend. That is to say, the Psalmist bids them turn their thoughts from the circumstances which were likely to sadden and depress them to those which were likely to give them the strength of joy. If they *were* few, God had promised to make them many, and God was true; if they were poor and weak, God was strong and rich, and He was their Shepherd and would not let them want; if their work was perilous and provoked their adversaries, it was something to have a city of their own once more, and to be free to fight for it; if the Temple was small, it was big enough to hold them; if they knew not the Law, they were being taught it, and taught to love as much of it as they knew. In short, with homely yet most effective philo-

sophy, they are urged to rejoice over that which is good and inspiring in their lot, rather than to brood sorrowfully over its ills and drawbacks.

And it is just this philosophy, simple and homely as it is, of which we sorely stand in need. We may each of us find in our lot worries, annoyances, hardships, griefs enough to make us sad and gloomy, if only we brood over them. And many of us do brood over them. We suffer the vexation, the injury, the loss of the moment to recall all the similar mishaps which have befallen us in the past, and to project into the future a long series of mishaps which are to befall us; we think ourselves worse used than ever men were before; nobody is so much put about, or has so much to bear, or meets so much unkindness and ingratitude as we do. Yet all the while there is hardly a neighbour who, if we knew his story, could not point us to burdens and injuries, and wrongs and losses, quite as hard to bear as ours. There are certainly many among our neighbours with whom, wronged and miserable as we deem ourselves to be, we should be sorry to exchange place and lot. Shame on our weakness, that, even against our better knowledge, we so often try to persuade ourselves that we are worse off and worse used than other men, that we are so oppressed by cares and sorrows that it is not to be expected that we should turn a bright face and a cheerful heart upon the world!

Do any ask, "But, after all, what joys have we to counter-balance our sorrows and help us to a brighter mood?" What joys! We have a thousand joys every day, or may have them. The bright sunshine; the freshness of the air; the sweet breath of flowers; the beauty of the trees in trunk and spreading branch and wealth of foliage; the songs of birds; the bracing airs of winter; the delicate etching of the frost, which brings the ferns out of the woods on to our

very window-panes ; the mystic and spiritual enchantment of the snow, which transforms our most familiar world into something rare and delicate and strange ; a kind look from a friend ; a beautiful thought from a book ; a quaint pleasant saying from a child ; an act of fidelity in a servant, or of considerate kindness from a neighbour ; the rest and peace that spring from prayer, or from a duty well and faithfully discharged, or from the public worship and communion of the Church—these, and how many such joys as these, are at our service every day we live.

But if any one object, “But these are such common trivial things !” we can only reply, Well, man, bring out your special and enormous miseries, and let us see what they are. You have lost a little money ; a servant has been unfaithful, a friend unkind ; your work has been hard and exhausting, straining the temper, irritating the nerves ; you are not the man you were, health is failing you ; you have lost a parent or a child ;—but why complete the list ? We all know very well that the troubles which look so large to us, if we dwell upon them—and which are really very hard to bear—are not strange and peculiar to us ; they are common to all men ; they are no greater than, they are neither so many nor so great as, the joys which are within our reach, if only we care to lay hold upon them. We know very well that they are not comparable, for instance, with the wrongs and miseries of these Jews in their little mountain city ; and that if, like them, we were to dwell on all the causes and occasions of gladness which our Father sends us, instead of brooding over the common and inevitable ills of life, we might sing songs as bright and merry as theirs. If, then, we would lead happy lives, if we would strengthen ourselves for a cheerful discharge of duty, let us cultivate this temper and habit of the soul ; let us look on the bright side of life rather than on its dark side ;

in place of brooding and murmuring and fretting, let us serve the Lord with gladness and be joyful in Him.

But even yet the great secret has not been told. The best wine from this Psalm-cup has been kept to the last. For it contains the true secret, the innermost and infallible secret, of a cheerful life ; and shews how it is possible for us all, whatever our natural temperament and whatever our outward circumstances, to rise into an habitual and tranquil gladness.

What is it which makes so many of us careful and sad ? It is, as I have already hinted, that we are for ever thinking of ourselves, of our right and wrongs, of our gains and losses ; it is because we unconsciously but habitually exaggerate whatever disasters befall us, and feel them as though it were worse for us to bear them than for our neighbours : it is because we think of our future as dependent on ourselves alone, because we cannot heartily believe that, if we try to do our duty, God will take care of us and provide for us. So long as we retain this selfish and unbelieving temper, so long as we distrust the providence of God and are wrapt up in ourselves, there is no chance of a happy life for us ; we shall be for ever fearing, even when we are best off, that some ill may be a-brewing to our rest, that some unforeseen trouble may come upon us ; we shall never feel that we meet with as much respect and kindness and success as we deserve or desire. There is no hope for us, I say, while we are selfish and faithless ; and therefore the Psalm bids us be unselfish and believing. Many as were the wrongs and miseries of the Jews, there is no mention, no trace of them in our Psalm. It is apparently the song of the happiest and merriest of men. And if we ask the secret of its mirth, we are told that the Jews were just learning to regard *all* men as the sons of God, to invite *all* lands to join in the worship of Jehovah ; we are told

that, in the passion and excitement of their recovered freedom and worship, they were trusting in God as they had never trusted Him before, nay, were rejoicing and exulting in Him. In other words, they were beginning to love man and to rest in God; and it is this new love and renewed trust which break forth into singing in the blithe music of their Psalm.

Now this, which is the great lesson of the Psalm, is also the great lesson of life. We shall never know a true peace or an enduring joy till, with simplicity and sincerity, we love our neighbour and repose in God, till charity has conquered selfishness and piety has conquered unbelief. When we reach that point—and we may all reach it if we try—when we love our brother and trust our Father, our joy will rise like a fountain night and day. Why should we brood over our own petty miseries and annoyances when our neighbours are suffering so many greater miseries, which, because we love them, we can help them to bear? Why should we fret about the future, when we know that God will take thought for it, and for us?

In fine, we once more come back on the old conclusion, that the one secret of a blessed life lies in obedience to the Christian law, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.”

XXII.

St. Paul Claims, and Waives, his Rights.

I CORINTHIANS IX.

WHEN the collectors of the temple-tax came to the Lord Jesus, and demanded of Him the half-shekel which every Jew was bound to pay, He claimed to be exempt on the ground that He was the Son of that King to whom the tax was due: yet, "lest He should offend," lest He should cause men to think evil of Him, lest He should hinder their approach to Him, He paid the tax, nay, wrought a miracle that He might pay it. Thus the Lord Jesus both asserted, and declined to assert, his freedom; thus He at once claimed, and waived, his rights. In the Chapter before us St. Paul follows in his Master's steps. He, too, both asserts his freedom, and declines to assert it; he claims his rights, yet he will not enforce them. And his motive is the same as his Master's. Although free, he becomes the servant of all, although conscious of his rights he waives his rights, "lest he should offend," lest "he should in any way hinder the gospel of Christ," that he might "gain the more," that he might "save some" who would not otherwise have received his gospel. It is to this imitation of Christ on the part of St. Paul that I have now to ask your attention.

If we would comprehend and master it, we must briefly

study the whole Chapter : nay, we must even pick up the threads of argument which the Apostle drops at the end of the previous Chapter.

In Chapter viii., then, St. Paul has laid down the principle that those who are strong should respect the scruples and prejudices of the weak ; that when Christian liberty says, " You may do this or that," Christian charity will often say, " And yet do not do it, lest you offend and hinder the weak." If meat, for instance, *i.e.*, the eating of meats offered to idols, be a stumbling-block to weak brethren, then it is well to eat no more meat so long as the world standeth.

Now at Corinth there was a faction in the Church which was disposed to judge St. Paul harshly, to question his authority, his teaching, his practice. And these men would be very apt to say, " It is all very well for Paul to talk so generously, but does his life square with his words? Does he practise what he preaches? Can he stand his own test, and meet his own requirement?" Chapter ix. is Paul's answer to that suspicion. It is an elaborate proof that he does curtail his natural liberty rather than offend the weak, that he waives rights which he might lawfully enforce, that he goes far beyond the mere bounds of duty, making himself all things to all men, in order that, by shewing love, he may win love for himself and above all for the gospel entrusted to him.

Easily and naturally his argument divides itself into two parts : in the first, we see how St. Paul claims his rights ; in the second, how he waives the very rights he had just claimed.

1. Mark how *St. Paul claims his rights*. He had a right, he says, to take about a sister—*i.e.*, a sister in the Lord—as a wife, like the other apostles, like the brethren of the Lord, like Cephas even, whom his opponents at Corinth held to

be the very model of a Christian apostle (Verse 5). Many points of interest are touched by this assertion. It tells us, for instance, what we are not told elsewhere, that not St. Peter alone, but most, if not all, of the apostles were married men. It implies that marriage is honourable in all; but that, in the Apostle's judgment, it is lawful for a Christian only *in the Lord*, only with those who believe. But the main point, the point which really bears on our argument is, that St. Paul felt that he too had a right to marry, although he elsewhere tells us that a married man is apt to care too much for "the things of his wife," while the unmarried man can devote himself, with an undivided heart, to "the things of the Lord."

This is one right claimed by the Apostle, the right to take about a wife with him, to secure himself the comfort of a gracious and sympathetic companion:—and this right clergymen and ministers, as a rule, have not perhaps been slow to exercise. He claims a second right—the right to live by the gospel he preached. And on this he lays far more stress than on the previous right—not because he thought it a more valuable privilege, but because he had often been called in question for not exercising it. His opponents had said again and again, "If Paul were a true apostle, if he were not conscious of some flaw in his title, like the other apostles he would claim to be maintained by the Church instead of working with his own hands." So often had this insinuation been cast at him, and so grievous was this misconstruction of his self-sacrifice to his ardent generous spirit, that it had become quite a sore point with Paul. He is for ever fingering it. And that, in part, no doubt, because he resented so cruel a misconstruction of his motives; but very much more, I think, because it put him in a cruelly difficult position: for how was he to justify himself in not taking a maintenance from the Church, without seeming to condemn the other

apostles, who did take a maintenance ; or, at least, without seeming to exalt himself above them? St. Paul was a gentleman. It was intolerable to him, whether to boast of his sacrifices, or to appear even to impugn the conduct of those whom he honoured and loved. He felt that the other apostles were but using their right, that he might have used it in their place ; and therefore it is that, even before he vindicates his own course, he vindicates theirs, and lays the very strongest emphasis on the fact, that those who preach the gospel *have a right* to live by the gospel.

He bases this right mainly on two grounds. First, *on the customs of society*. The soldier does not go to war at his own charge. He who plants a vineyard eats of its fruit. The goat-herd lives by selling the milk of his flock. In short, all men live by their labour ; why are not ministers and apostles to live by theirs? And the argument is just as cogent *now* as *then*. Ministers are still the only men whom some persons expect to work for nothing, to serve them without a wage. And I suppose the expectation arises in large measure from the suspicion that ministers don't work, or that their work is not very hard. But surely that work is the hardest which most rapidly exhausts the vital force, which most commonly impairs health of brain and nerve and muscle. Dangerous professions, trades injurious to health, are justly the highest paid. And after some experience both of business and of the ministry of the Word, I give it as my conviction that the ministry is a dangerous profession ; that any man, who does his duty in it, uses up his nervous energy at a rate which cannot but impair his health ; that his work is harder and more exhausting than almost any other kind of labour. If any of you are thinking of putting your sons or yourselves into the ministry, either that you may have a comfortable provision, or that they may enjoy a quiet and easy life, let me warn you that you could make no greater

mistake. A minister can only hope to enjoy an easy unexhausting life, or to attain many years, in proportion as he neglects the duties of his office, or goes through them without putting his life and strength into them. You may be very sure that every sermon which moves you to emotion has moved the preacher far more deeply ; that whenever he quickens you into new life or more life, it is because he is imparting his life to you and sacrificing himself for your good. A profession so exhausting, work so hard, St. Paul argues in effect, should, according to all social rules, be well paid. The minister has a clear right to his maintenance.

But then, as now, there were good persons who did not much care for argument, unless the argument were backed by a text. To satisfy these weak brethren, St. Paul, who became all things to all men, gave them a cluster of texts. He draws his second ground of argument from *the inspired Scriptures*. His first text is from Moses (Verse 9). Moses said, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." And this law was not given simply because God cares for oxen. It was given because God cares for men, because He would have them both do what was right and receive their dues. The working-man, the labourer, has an interest in this law, as well as the minister ; the plowman and the thresher, who are often not so well cared for as the cattle, as well as the clergy. Moses gave this law about oxen, says Paul, "that he who ploweth might plow in hope, and he that thresheth might thresh in hope of partaking" the harvest they prepare for the market ; that they might have their full share of it, and live, live well and easily, by their labour ; and thus he taught that God takes thought for them. But the text applies to ministers as well as to workmen. God cares *even for ministers!* If they plough up hard hearts, and sow good seed in the broken furrows, are they to be muzzled when the corn is trodden out?

Have not they as clear a right to live by their labour as the oxen, the plowman, the sower, the thresher? If they sow that which is spiritual, is it much that they reap of that which is carnal? If they prepare men for heaven, is it much that men should feed them while they are on earth?

St. Paul gives a second text (Verse 13), a text, or proof, drawn from the ceremonial of Hebrew worship. The priests lived by the temple because they spent their time and energy in serving the temple; they "shared with the altar," *i.e.*, they had their part in all the good things laid upon it, because they served the altar. And, in like manner, argues the Apostle, those who serve the Church should live by the Church; those who minister to the spiritual wants of men should live by their ministry. Nay, in applying this second text, he quotes a third. Christ Himself, when He sent forth the seventy, had bidden them take neither purse nor scrip, on the express ground that the workman is worthy of his wage. "*The Lord* has ordained that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel" (Verse 14).

Here, then, are no less than three texts to prove that Holy Writ confirms the customs of society, that Scripture no less than social rule enforces the right to maintenance of those who serve, whether in the Church or in the world. To this recognized relation between work and wages the Apostle appeals in defence of his own right. In the second verse, he says: "the seal or attestation of our apostleship are *ye*." You Corinthians, at least, should not question my claims, for you have felt my power. And in Verses 11 and 12, he adds, "If you admit others to be apostles, and to have this claim on you for maintenance, should you not much more admit my claim to the apostleship, my right to be maintained? If I have given you a new life, and nourished it, and still continue to nourish it, is it much that you should keep me in life? Would it be politic of

you, would it be a wise economy, to let me starve while I can still be of service to you? or even to let me overtax my energies and waste on tent-making power which might be expended on you? *Is* the life more than meat, and the soul more than the body? *Has* the workman a right to his wage? *Should* the wage bear some proportion to the difficulty and danger of his work? Well, I die daily; I wear myself out in the endeavour to give you spiritual things, eternal things. Do you grudge to give me the carnal things which perish in the using?" Paid! no minister who does his work honestly is or can be paid by those to whom he preaches. *His* wage, the wage that really corresponds to and requites his work, is with God, and will be paid without grudging by and bye. But that is no reason why those who hear him should let him starve, or compel, or even permit, him to waste his energies in excessive toil. Mere selfishness and thrift might teach them when once they have a minister to their mind, a man who can really teach them what they need to learn and incite them to the duties they ought to do, to keep him in life and health. Even this wise thrift, however, is not always practised. And perhaps the best that can be said for some churches is, that they are so fond of their minister, and so conscious *they* cannot adequately repay him, that they do their utmost to hurry him into that world in which every act of service meets its due recompense of reward.

On these grounds, then, on the customs of society, on the revelations of Scripture, and on the sentiment of natural justice, St. Paul emphatically claims his rights both to marriage and to maintenance.

2. Let us mark how, after so strongly asserting and proving them, *Paul waives his rights*: for this is the main argument of the Chapter: his ruling aim throughout is to shew

that he only asks the Corinthians to do for their weak brethren what he himself has done for *them*—viz., to forego rights which they might exact, to restrain their lawful freedom of action when, by using it to the full, they might injure and offend those for whom Christ died. It is to induce them to this self-restraint, this brotherly self-abnegation, that he tells them why he did not claim and use rights which he knew to be his.

And, first, he did not use his rights in the gospel to the full, "*lest he should hinder the gospel of Christ*" (Verse 12). Then, as now, there were men who were ever ready to find selfish and interested motives even for the wisest and most generous conduct,—men who were very ready to say, even of the apostles themselves, "Ah, these men talk about charity and self-denial and magnanimity! It is their trade. They are like all the priests who came before them. If it were not for the gifts laid on the altar, they would not serve it. They talk big, and well; but it is the pocket, not the heart, which prompts them. They do not care for our good, but for their own gain: why should we listen to them?" To save his message from any such reproach, to save his ministry from any such hindrance, to take away any even the slightest ground for this miserable misconstruction of his motives, St. Paul resolved that he would not claim his right of maintenance; that he would work with his own hands; that, as he pathetically expresses it, he would "*bear all things*"—all the fatigues of labour, all the pain of having to expend on work which others might have done as well as he powers which they did not possess, to the injury of the one work for which he was specially fitted. Whatever others might do, and ought to do, *he* would give no occasion of offence, no ground for suspicion, to the sharp Greek traders of the sea-coast and to the keen Jewish brokers

among whom so much of his life was spent. Even though in some respects it might be bad for them, and bad for him, that he should abstract from their service, or from his own time of rest, many hours for the manual labour by which he earned his bread, he would work "night and day" rather than suffer the progress of the gospel to be impeded by their base suspicions. He would be able to stand before them and say, "I have taken, I have coveted, no man's silver or gold. I am the poorest man here this day. These hands, worn with toil, must still earn my bread. I have given you the gospel for love, not for hire : I have given you *myself*."

Secondly, he did not use his rights in the gospel to the full, *lest he should lose his boast* (Verses 15—18). "Better," he says, "for *me* to die than for my boast to die. No one shall rob me of that." It was no merit in him that he preached the gospel ; he was bound to preach it, could not help preaching it. A sacred and overmastering "necessity" to preach was laid on him. When he had preached his best, he was but an unprofitable servant ; he had simply discharged the stewardship entrusted to him. But if he preached willingly, not of necessity, but of his own cheerful and unforced accord, then he rose into a holy freedom, and would still have been "free of all men," even though he had permitted them to sustain him. But if he went further still, if he waived his right to a sustenance ; if, to avoid misconstruction, he went beyond the bounds of duty, if he did more than God demanded of him, and much more than men had a right to expect, then he had whereof to boast. Not that this excess of duty was a boast to be flaunted before the eyes of men—a boast in the vulgar sense. St. Paul knew very well that it was the grace of God which wrought in him. But it surely was something to be glad about, and to be thankful for, that God's grace was so evidently at work in him that it could carry him beyond the

lines of mere duty, and constrain him to waive the rights which other men and apostles used. So that St. Paul's choicest reward for the present was, that he had no reward of men, just as the freedom he valued most was that which made him the servant of all men. His boast was, that he was not only a servant, not only a faithful and diligent servant, but a servant who took no wages, in order to prove that love was the sole motive and inspiration of his service.

Now there is a fine principle here, which we shall do well to study and appropriate. Necessity was laid on St. Paul: and he turned "necessity" into "freedom," by doing of a willing mind what he felt bound to do. And, in like manner, we become free, so soon as we do freely what we *must* do somehow. When "I *must*" becomes "I *will*," we enter into perfect liberty. If you would be free, do not say, "I *must* serve God in my daily life," or "I *must* love my neighbour as myself," or "I *must* contribute to the work and maintenance of the Church." Say rather, "I *will* love God, I cannot help loving Him;" "I *will* love my neighbour, since God, who loves me, wishes me to love him;" "I *will* serve and help the Church, for I love it, and am willing to sacrifice myself for its good." Only thus do we rise out of the hard grinding necessities of unwelcome duty into the freedom of a voluntary and happy service, and walk at large because we seek the commandments of God.

Thirdly, St. Paul did not use his rights in the gospel to the full, *that he might "gain the more"* (Verses 19—23). The narrow bigotries of the Jewish converts were, no doubt, very narrow and repulsive to Paul, the licence of the Greeks very puerile and repugnant, the scruples of the weak very babyish, the arrogance of the strong very base; and to be suspected of selfish and interested motives, or even to have to guard against suspicions, must have been almost intolerable to a man of his generous self-devotion. But he "bears

all things," even these, that he may win men of every grade and kind to the service of Christ. To the Jew he became a Jew, to the weak, weak; although not under the law, he came under it; although not an outlaw to God, he could dispense with law. Wherever he found a man, he found a brother for whom Christ died; and that this man might be taught the grace of our Lord Jesus, St. Paul could stoop to his prejudices, to his weaknesses, to his conditions and needs, that he might win him for Christ.

Finally, St. Paul did not use his rights in the gospel to the full, *because self-denial and self-restraint are conditions of all high culture, all noble work* (Verses 24—7). In the closing verses of the Chapter—verses on which, despite their beauty, we cannot now linger as they deserve—he draws an illustration from the athletic games or sports of classical times. The athlete, he says, the racer, or the boxer, must go into training. He who trains best will win. Each must be temperate in all things, must deny himself pleasures of the table and of the couch, must compel himself to exercises which are very tiring and exhausting. He must both do much which else he would not do, and abstain from much which would be perfectly lawful were he not about to contend for the prize. And he must carry on his training to the very end. It is nothing that he has trained well, that he has contended well, before; nothing that he has carried off the prize in many a previous and lesser contest. If he neglect training now, or train insufficiently, he may be rejected, cast away, even before the contest, as unfit: he is certain not to win. Now St. Paul had entered himself, not for a corruptible crown, for no fading wreath of parsley or laurel, but for an incorruptible: and *he meant to win*. And therefore he would train heartily, willingly. He would shrink from no necessary toil of exercise. He would deny himself much that he held lawful, and abstain from

much which would have been pleasant, that he might be able to run and to contend ; that he might be able to take his line certainly and swiftly ; that he might learn to plant his blows, not in the air, but on his adversary. His body, or "the mind of his flesh," as he calls it, was his adversary, with its foolish eager cravings for this or that enjoyment, its reluctance to encounter pain and effort. He would bruise and punish it till he had reduced it to subjection, till he could lead it in triumph a conquered victim, as the victor in the games led his defeated rivals. St. Paul felt that only thus could he acquire a high spiritual culture, and inure himself to the conflict in which he was engaged.

Do not we feel it too, and know it? If we are seeking to live in the spirit rather than in the flesh, that we may win the crown of glory which fadeth not away, must we not train ourselves if we are to "run as not uncertainly," to "fight as not striking the air"? Must we not punish the body, and keep it under? must we not deny ourselves much that would be lawful to us, if we have set our hearts on winning "glory, honour, and immortality?" If, then, we are of those who mean to run and strive for "the incorruptible crown," let us, like St. Paul, be temperate in all things ; let us abstain from whatever may hinder us, not only from things unlawful, but also from things which, though lawful, are not expedient for us. Let us not pamper the body, or be for ever aiming at ease and enjoyment ; but for the joy set before us, let us train ourselves by self-denials hard to flesh and blood, that we may be fit for the sacred conflict, and win the eternal prize.

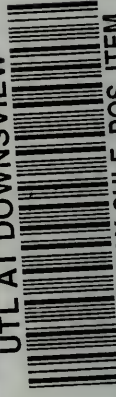


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